A YEAR AMONG THE GIRLS

by Darrell G. Raynor

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For my beloved wife
who demonstrated of what finer steel
a real woman's soul may be composed

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A YEAR AMONG THE GIRLS

Chapter One

On the most traumatic night of my life, nothing very eventful happened. I was a guest at the home of a successful middle-aged businessman and his wife. We had dinner, we sat and chatted, looked over some scrapbooks, watched an hour of television, petted some beautiful cats, and made our adieux about eleven o'clock.

My host's business associate, who had joined us at dinner, and had called for me at my motel, drove me back home. It was glorious southern California weather, warm and comfortable, and superficially I was at ease.

The fact is that the fabric of my life was quaking like an aspen in a windstorm, and my future was dissolving into a series of terrifying possibilities and fantasies the like of which I had never seriously contemplated, though their shadows had been with me since I was a small boy some forty years before.

There were minor oddities that might have disquieted most people. I knew who my host was in a general sort of

way, but I did not know his true name or his real business. I had a vague idea where I was—somewhere in the hills around Los Angeles—but before, during, and after my visit I did not know the address of the isolated hillside house, nor could I have found it again. I had met my host once before and had been fascinated by what he represented, but I had never met him as I was to meet him that evening.

Those elements of mystery were not what was bothering me. They might be regarded by some as adventurous or suspicious, but not by me. I knew I was in no danger physically. I did know—knew to the very depths of my being—that I was in frightful danger psychologically. It was that factor that made the evening traumatic—for I could no more have refused that invitation than I could have cut off my right arm. Yet, as I said, nothing particularly eventful marred the peaceful pattern of those five hours.

What made that night strange was that I did not have a host, but two hostesses. My businessman host had been replaced by a person who called himself Virginia, insisted upon being regarded as the sister of my host, and upon being treated as a lady and an individual in his own right. That this Virginia was in fact the same person as the gray-haired, hard-headed biochemist I had met before was not a secret to me. I had expected it; yet the reality brought me at last face to face with one of the pivotal crises of my life.

For I had managed to make contact with and gain admission to the home of the man who might well be America's leading transvestite, and was surely one of the best informed persons in the world on the mysterious phe-

nomenon of transvestism. In that day and at that time this man who sometimes called himself by the name of Virginia was the focus of attention for the secret world of men who practiced cross-dressing. He was the fountainhead of communications, the founder and organizer of the world's first society of transvestites, and the editor and publisher of the world's first serious magazine of transvestism.

He was also the first transvestite I had ever met.

The second transvestite I ever met sat opposite me at that dinner table. I had met him a scant hour before, and it had been he who had picked me up at my motel and driven me to this date. He was a big genial man, over six feet tall, heavily built, muscled like a truck driver, wearing a red checked shirt—altogether he was as unlike anyone's preconceptions of a female impersonator as can be imagined.

The dinner date had been confirmed a couple of days before when I had completed the business that had brought me to southern California that March. I had called and had been informed that someone would pick me up at my motel at six p. m. Who that someone would be was not indicated and, as I waited in my motel for the hour to arrive, my nerves were on edge. This entire trip had been a tense one for me, and this date—the culmination of my efforts for the past two months—was a climax I both sought and dreaded.

I had no idea who would come for me. Would it be a man, someone like the man I had met before? Or would it be some simpering effeminate personality? Or would it be a woman, or someone who might look outwardly like a woman? The man who called for me fitted none of those descriptions; one wondered whether he had the right num-

ber, was this an error? But he spoke my name and I knew that this was the person. He had a big car, a Cadillac, I believe, of several years' vintage. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed some sort of sticker of a religious order on the side window of the driver's seat. I was tense enough to notice all sorts of details then.

Robert Stevens, as he called himself, was no truck driver. He chatted softly as he tooled the big car up to the freeway and along the already dark roads. He was aware of my high-strung condition and he seemed determined to put me more at ease as he talked of his past. He had been manager of a radio station somewhere in the East, he had had personal and family troubles, he had given that up and come out to Los Angeles to assist "Virginia" on the magazine. As he talked I sensed a personality that had been "through the mill," that had learned compassion, and that sought to give others the benefit of this.

"If you've never dressed," he said, as we turned into a dark and narrow canyon road, off the freeway, "try not to. Never go any deeper into this than you can. Of course," he added, "if you have to, well . . ."

I thought about his advice and made no comment. It touched on one of the psychic winds that were twisting me mentally and agonizingly, and I was in no position to judge the quality of his advice. I had a lot to learn, a very great deal, and the weathering of the storm that was stirring me would take much strength and knowledge.

I knew also that Robert was not the only name he used. Like Charles, my host, who was Virginia, Robert Stevens was sometimes known as Barbara Ellen. It didn't seem to trouble this burly man.

After twisting through narrow wooded passages, then up a steep hill, we stopped and got out. It was dark, the mountainside loomed over us and stretched away at our feet, and I could see the outlines in starlight of a ranch-type house perched on a narrow cleft of the mountain. Where I was I had no idea, but this was my destination.

Bob rang the bell. In a moment it was answered and we stepped in. Bob introduced me to our hostess—Doreen. She was a gentle, gray-haired lady, unquestionably a genuine female, who spoke in a soft British accent and asked us to make ourselves at home. She was dressed in a gold lamé outfit, with glistening capri pants and sandals—not at all a strange costume for Los Angeles. She returned to the kitchen and Bob and I made ourselves comfortable.

The house was spacious, apparently newly constructed, and comfortably appointed. A very large living room that merged with the dining room featured dormer beams, and housed a hi-fi set, a large television console, and an electric organ. I ran my hands over the keys and Doreen came in from the kitchen to suggest that I play if I felt like it. However, I do not know how so I declined the offer, wishing intensely that I did know how. It might have helped, for I was tense and evidently Doreen knew it.

I sat down in the living room and chatted lightly with Bob. Our host, Charles, was nowhere to be seen. Then, as Bob and I were talking, I heard a tread and looked up. Virginia had made her entry.

I looked at the woman who met my eyes and the first thought that shot into my mind was, "too big, too big." It was perhaps unfair, but that was my immediate impression of the first man I had ever seen trying to pass as a woman. It was unfair because Virginia is highly successful

at so passing, and my reaction doubtless came from prior knowledge of what I was to meet.

Anyone else meeting Virginia would suppose himself meeting a woman, so expert was the transformation. I saw a lady, middle-aged, whose brown hair was expertly coiffed, whose buxom figure was garbed in a gold lamé gown, who wore rings, bracelet, necklace, and earrings, whose surprising decolletage revealed unmistakably the deep cleft of the female bosom, and whose long and expertly manicured fingers were now held out for my handshake. I stood up and gravely allowed Bob to introduce me formally to Virginia, carefully going through the ritual of ignoring the fact that only a few days before I had eaten out with Charles and gabbed for hours with him as if he were an old friend.

When Doreen came in to announce seating, I realized that they had matching outfits, except that Virginia wore skirts and Doreen wore trousers. We kept up the pretense that Virginia was a woman throughout the meal and indeed throughout the evening. It is a point upon which my host was very exacting. It did not make it easy for me.

Doreen was perceptive, for at one point in the meal she asked me if I was nervous. No, I replied, I'm usually rather silent when meeting strangers for the first time; I'll ease up after a while. But as I sat there listening to light talk, playing the role of a guest at a normal household, I suddenly said to myself, "I am either in the middle of a very bad dream, or I am in the presence of a raving lunatic."

Neither was true. This was no dream. I was wide awake and it was happening. And Charles/Virginia was a sane, responsible, and rational member of society.

But the feeling of being in the midst of a bad dream persisted. It was to persist for months, even as it had already haunted me for the past two months, the twenty-four-hour-a-day bad dream that had brought me to this rendezvous.

After dinner we sat and talked about transvestism. Charles had collected a huge scrapbook of newspaper clippings and magazine articles on the subject and Virginia brought this out for my inspection. I went through it slowly, for it was a fascinating and, in some instances, tragic compilation.

Later Virginia turned on a certain television hour, to watch an actor who would be doing a female impersonation as part of the comedy routine. "He always manages to work in something like that," Virginia explained to me, "and I want to see if he runs true to form."

The actor did, putting on a ludicrous performance as a mock Cleopatra, and Virginia watched this in satisfaction. "There are certain actors who never miss a chance to cross-dress when they can get away with it. You'd be surprised how much transvestism is around."

The night drew on, Virginia began to yawn, and Bob indicated to me that we should take our leave. Our host was an early-to-bed type, so we rose and made our farewells. The evening had been tremendously instructive for me, and our talk had encompassed many things.

But as we shook hands to depart, Virginia looked at me rather plaintively and said softly, "You didn't see any of Charles tonight, did you?" I smiled and said, "No, not really, except when you get into an argument and get heated up, and then Charles begins to show through."

Virginia smiled and nodded. "I guess so," was the reply. "He is a hot-headed type when he's aroused."

As we took our leave, Virginia asked me how I could be contacted when I returned East. I gave a name and a post office box, and said I would write. As we climbed into the car, I saw silhouetted in the light of the open door the golden figure of what seemed to be a woman waving to us. We waved back, and Bob started the engine.

Back through the darkness of the mountain road, onto the crowded freeway with its flashing lights of passing cars, an occasional view of the bright glow of one of America's great cities spread out below us. I sat next to the man who was Barbara Ellen and I knew that life would never be the same for me again.

I had made contact with a world that had existed for me only in the most secret depths of shameful erotic fantasies—and that world was real, flesh-and-blood, and it spread across the country from one end to the other. The key to that world had been placed in my hand tonight, and I knew that I could not prevent myself from using it.

What had brought me to this point of no return?

Chapter Two

A year and a half have passed since that March night in Los Angeles. Looking back at the events which preceded and followed it, I realize that I was far from my normal self. I think it safe to say that I was passing through a form of nervous breakdown, a period in which my normal balances of judgment were suspended, in which emotions and neurotic strains, hitherto under control, had broken through my last reserves and were running rampant.

You would not perhaps have known this had you known me then. Those who worked with me never suspected; for my job was fulfilled without any hitch or sign of loss of ability. My wife suspected, I know; for the things which used to occupy my evenings and my spare time were neglected. It was apparent to her that I was moody, unwilling to concentrate, allowing personal correspondence and other pleasures to remain unattended. I had an interesting

assignment I had been working on at home, but gradually it was suspended half finished.

It is possible to live through a nervous breakdown without anyone else noticing. Some of us have strong cover reserves; I for one. I was in the midst of a mental fever so strong as almost to dominate every conscious moment —such a fever as cannot be explained to anyone, a fever of thought and desire incomprehensible to any save a transvestite, and yet, in my case, I had never consciously considered myself to be such.

Briefly, what is transvestism? In the simplest definition, it is an irrational, compulsive desire to wear the clothes of the other sex. There are more complex definitions, but this will do for now. Such a desire may be suppressed, it may be transmuted into other manifestations, or it may be catered to. But it exists, and it arises, like all human lusts, out of the depths of the subconscious mind—out of factors molded in infancy and in childhood.

It is as old as human civilization. Its record goes back to the dawn of time and can be found in every known society, advanced or primitive, decadent or resurgent. Provisions dealing with it can be found in every religion, and laws dealing with it can be found all over the world, in most towns and communities to this very day.

For me, transvestism was a fantasy that occasionally penetrated my night dreams or my erotic considerations; but it had remained primarily a deeply buried stream of thought never rising to the surface, never possessing my active interest, never obsessing my activities.

Every man has sexual fantasies. It is a part of the male drive and a natural factor in all male-female relationships. There is nothing to be ashamed of in this, for without such

erotic fantasies there would be no taking in love, no intercourse, no human race. The saying is that men in love put their women upon a pedestal. This is a way of saying that the women of their sexual imagery are idealizations of real women. It is a portrait of the other sex without human flaws, devoid of sweat, tears, and the fears and burdens of the flesh.

Most men's sexual fantasies take the form of an idealized vision of the part of the woman that excites them most. For some it is the breasts that arouse their masculinity. For others it is the thighs, the legs, the ankles, the neck, the hair. For many it is the touch and smell of the female that does it.

Fetishism is a common manifestation of this. In this, the man seizes upon a specific object attached to the feminine image and makes this his point of arousal. Fetishism in a mild, strictly mental form is extremely common. It is the mere sight of a high heel lying beside the bed that brings some husbands to the boiling point. For others it is a carelessly flung bit of lingerie, a pair of panties, a bra, a girdle, a pair of stockings, a dress, a fur piece, a jewel.

Now the more advanced form of fetishism, the kind you will find described in psychiatry case histories, is that in which the man actually requires contact with the object of his sexual lust in order to fulfill his manhood. In a manner of speaking, transvestism is a form of this, or at least it begins in that fashion in early boyhood, in the throes of adolescence. But the potential transvestite fantasies—not the sight of the garment or the touch of it—but himself as wearing it.

The mere thought of wearing something forbidden

to men and permitted to women is enough to arouse the male lust to the boiling point. For who-knows-how-many men the thought is enough. The nature of the erotic fantasy establishes itself in puberty and through adolescence. From that time on, though the man live to be ninety, this is what will arouse him, this is where his sexual thoughts will wander.

Transvestism begins there, in the mind. Very probably for the majority of men, it remains in the mind, going no further. The need to transform the exciting fantasy into reality does not become compulsive in all. It does become a compulsion in some.

To turn this sort of fantasy into experimental reality is not hard. Experiment does not always produce the ecstasy that the erotically excited mind had expected. Often it just produces the discovery that women's clothing is only that—clothes and nothing more. Things of cloth with no inherent powers.

The result of early experiment is usually disappointment, a sense of shame for having been foolish enough to try it, and a vow not to be so foolish again. The vow does not work; invariably the erotic fantasy comes to the fore again as time passes, and more experimentation is in order.

Some stop there, give it up, and allow the fantasy to remain a thing of the bed and the woman. Others cannot let it go, continue the experiment until they conjure up an attachment to the clothing that seems to reconstruct the excitement they had expected. They go on from there . . .

As a boy this was the manner in which my own erotic imagery took shape. I am not a psychologist and I will

not attempt here to trace the roots of why this was so. But I know that, as far back as I can remember, what aroused my masculinity was the thought of wearing the undergarments of the feminine sex. I have put this deliberately as a masculine manifestation. For me, it was always that.

The fantasy generally took the form of imagining myself being forced to wear such clothing as punishment for some imaginary misdemeanor. That was how my mind got around the shame of desire—it invented an outside compulsion beyond my power to combat. This type of masochistic vision is also one of the commonest factors of early transvestism. It disappears with experimentation.

To get back to my own case, it can be said that transvestism was a buried stream throughout the greater part of my life. A few hasty experiments now and then when opportunity coincided with lust, but that was the total of my actual experience. I was satisfied simply to fantasy it when aroused. My life was full, my mind replete with studies, reading, and many interests, and I had no room to dwell for long on the abnormal state of my erotic inner self.

I have been married over twenty years. I am a college graduate and the father of teen-agers. I have achieved success in my chosen work. I own my home and make a good living. My income is within the top ten per cent in America.

I always knew that potentially I was a transvestite. When I chanced across some bit of news or an item concerning such people, I sympathized with them and learned what I could. I was aware that had life not treated me so fortunately I probably would have given way to the

buried desires. But my marriage was a happy one and my routine had achieved a certain stability and satisfying uniformity. There was no occasion for any change in my way of living—until three years ago.

They speak of the dangerous forties, of what is called a male change of life. I do not know whether that affected me, though I was the right age. What happened to me was a combination of sudden successes and sudden burdens and sudden changes. Within three months I hit the top of my profession, received a difficult assignment that would take me many times across the country alone among strangers, and my father had a stroke and suddenly became my personal responsibility.

It meant a sharp violent break with all the routines of my past. Now I traveled as I had never traveled before, at odd times, in odd places, under unusual tension. I felt the burden of business responsibility on my shoulders as never before, and I found myself charged with the care of a man who had been my psychological antagonist all my growing days.

Psychologists are well aware of the problems of parental hatred and the manner in which it marks the psyche. I am old enough and mature enough to recognize that my father himself was a victim of his upbringing. But this knowledge does not alter the fact that, deep down, I hated him. This was a concealed hatred, as such things usually are, but it was a deep, thoroughly entrenched part of my whole social attitude.

I have a theory that most transvestites are father haters; that most homosexuals are mother haters. I do not equate transvestism with homosexuality for this reason. I was a father hater. And now my father was in my care and I

was bound and expected to act concerned, to see that he had the best of care, to play the role of the devoted son.

A year went by—a year of unusual events in my life, of triumphs, of new relationships, of a changing personality, one that rose over these new stresses, that began to acquire a further self-estimation, an advanced image of mature success.

Stress must take its toll. I was riding high, but the strain on my system was telling. My nerves were taut and I was working harder and longer than I ever had.

Underneath, in the hidden springs of my subconscious, new forces were thrusting through. I felt the sap of my masculinity rising to higher pitches than ever before. I became intensely aware of women, more so than ever was normal to me before. My sexual fantasies began to shape themselves into sharper forms, more violent, more vivid.

I thought about transvestism. I became actively curious about it. Were there really such people? What were they like? Did they see things as I did?

There is a literature of transvestism, but it is limited, rare, and not very satisfactory. There are nasty little stores on Main Street in Los Angeles and 42nd Street in New York that sometimes have little booklets that touch on the subject. One such series was being produced in that year of stress, a group containing purported letters from transvestites and photographs. I bought two or three of these booklets. They added to my frustration; for some of the letters were clearly authentic, reflecting the same sort of things I had thought of and fantasied, reflecting the frustration of lonely men. Photographs of such men dressed as women added to the picture of a world of lonely men, eager to express their inner feelings even in

the pages of as obviously uncaring commercial booklets as the ones they would appear in. But there was no way of contacting one of these fellow souls, for no addresses were given and the publisher would not forward letters.

By this time I wanted to meet one, for the thought was coming uppermost in my mind for longer and longer periods that I would like to sit and exchange inner feelings with someone who understood. But who could you find save a transvestite? The subject was incomprehensible to the general public. It was a matter of ridicule, of shame, of folly.

I think that the nervous breakdown became extreme in December. It grew more manifest in January. In that month, two things occurred. I saw a copy of a real transvestite magazine in a store in New York, and a curious Canadian newspaper found its way into my hands.

The magazine was fantastically overpriced, sealed in cellophane, and not to be examined. I hung in indecision for two weeks before I sacrificed the money for it.

The newspaper was a weird sort of thing. The copy was a year old and it came into my hands through a friend who had passed it along just because it was so outrageous. It had an amazing personals column, more amazing than any United States paper would dare to print. In it, advertising for correspondents, were requests from men and women interested in the most unorthodox of erotic pursuits. Among these ads were two or three for correspondence about transvestism. They looked authentic, but they were already a year old.

Nonetheless the newspaper personals meant that a world of such people existed and they could be contacted. The costly magazine confirmed this to the hilt. It was the

magazine published by the man who called himself Virginia, and the address of the publisher was a post office box in Los Angeles.

If you had put a thermometer in my mouth, it might not have registered a fever. But the fever was there, though in the mind.

It raged unabated day and night. I had all I could do to manage my desk in the office, for the thought of cross-dressing had become overpowering. By the greatest effort of will, I was able to concentrate on my work, but if I let up for a moment the forbidden visions worked their way uppermost. On the streets, my mind churned with the thought of feminine clothing. I noticed every woman that passed, and just the sight of a store displaying lingerie would produce almost a fainting sensation, so greatly did it heighten my sick fantasies. Nylon, and lace, and pink things . . . and I could think of nothing else. In the subway, I would hang onto a post and almost reel with the power of my imagination. At night I could think of nothing else; it was impossible to read a book or concentrate on television or movies. In bed, the thought of dressing myself in these things obsessed me totally.

This was fever, this was brainstorm, this was the buried underground stream of transvestism, hidden from the days of my childhood, bursting through the cracks that strain and stress had seamed through my life the past year and a half, and rampaging at last on the surface of my mind, unchecked and screaming for fulfillment.

If this was not a nervous breakdown, I do not know what such a thing is.

I had business in Los Angeles in March. I told myself that my only outlet, my burning necessity, was to look

up this publisher/editor and meet him, talk with him, learn how to control my desires, how to put this thing into perspective, how to adjust. I was desperate.

I wrote a cautious note to him, posing as a journalist interested in the problem. There was no answer, and I could not delay. Time was passing and I could not face the horror of this trip westward without the means of making this contact.

I wrote a less cautious note, implying that I had something in common with him, that I needed to talk to him. I waited. Finally, a week later, a small pink envelope dropped on my desk in the morning mail. I think I knew at once what it was. I opened it and found a note signed "Virginia" saying to let him know when and where I would be in Los Angeles, and he would call me.

I sent him the information at once, and the next few days went by in a state of inner excitement, uneasy concern, anguish, soul-searching, and silent guilt. I kept saying to myself: This is just a legitimate bit of research. I don't have to commit myself to him. If he's a queer or a nut, I can brush him off.

I arrived in Los Angeles, I put up at my motel, I waited. No call for me. I became restless, took my rented car, went downtown, did some shopping. I went into a phone booth, called the motel. Was there a message for me? Yes. Call this number. I hung up the receiver, my heart pounding, sweat on my brow.

I deposited the dime, dialed with trembling fingers. I heard the phone ring on the other end, once, twice, thrice. Somebody picked up the receiver and said hello in a pleasant, firm masculine voice. I identified myself. "Oh yes," said the voice at the other end. "I meant to call you

earlier but I was busy." I said, in what I believe was a calm, controlled tone, "When can we get together?"

The voice was silent a moment. Then he said, "Well, now that depends." He hesitated a moment, then sprang what was surely the $64,000 question of my entire life, "Are you one of us?"

I hung at that instant suspended between heaven and earth, between Scylla and Charybdis, between the desire to know and the clamor of alarm. They say a drowning man reviews his entire life in the seconds it takes him to go down. In that next second, in a hot phone booth in downtown Los Angeles, I reviewed my own life, took stock of my secret mind, of my emotional history, and made my decision.

"Yes, I believe so," I replied.

Chapter Three

It was five o'clock and I was waiting in my motel room for the owner of that voice to keep the appointment he had made with me. I sat in an easy chair, too nervous to read, and every sound of a car outside made me jump. Was this the man? What would he be like? Would I be able to stand him?

I believe I had formed an image of what a transvestite would be like from various articles and case histories of abnormal sexual behavior. It's hard to imagine the appearance of people from such works, couched in the stilted language of medical cases and the sometimes slanted opinions of writers who knew nothing real about the subject. The popular image of the female impersonator was hovering in the background—a swishy, sissified, limp-wristed type, something a good deal less than a man, the kind of person I have always bristled at, resented, disliked in the same way any normal man

tends to bristle at the flagrant faggot. How much of this would be present in the man I was going to meet? Or in any such men?

On the other hand the articles I had read in the magazine edited by my coming visitor and articles he had written for such magazines as *Sexology* indicated that transvestites were supposed to be regular he-men in their male appearances, just like any other man, and quite undetectable by any odd or feminine mannerisms. It was certainly true of me, but then how much of a transvestite was I? Not much, certainly, if experience counted for anything.

My assertion that I believed I was one of their number was a product of searching self-analysis. Since my erotic impulses had consistently run to such fantasies since I was a boy, and since over the years I had sometimes tried out nightgowns and other bits of lingerie when alone behind the locked doors of motel or hotel rooms, and had found myself enjoying the sensations, I had finally forced myself—under the pressure of my feverish nervous condition—to admit this to another person. The admission was a Rubicon crossed, but to what strange lands did it lead? I was masculine, I was erotically attracted by the female sex and, unlike the statistics given by the *Kinsey Report*, I had never remotely desired even a single homosexual act in my entire life. But was this true for the other, more advanced cases?

If I were one of their number, I was surely one on the outermost perimeter of their world, and the man I was meeting was surely at the center itself. How different would he be from me?

A car parked outside my motel room, a door slammed,

footsteps came to my door. The bell rang. I arose, went to the door, opened it.

Charles came in; we introduced ourselves. He was a man of my own age, nearing fifty; he was about my build, blue-eyed, somewhat pinch-featured, but nonetheless a solid figure of a man. He had iron-gray hair brushed firmly back along his scalp, and a lot of it.

His voice was low but firm and had the self-confident air of one who knows what he is about and is sure of his opinions.

We sat down, chatted a bit generally, and finally began to get down to mutual understanding. Apparently I passed his inspection; for after a while he relaxed, and we both felt free to talk at will.

He had copies of his magazine with him, some other material, an envelope of photographs. The pictures were color shots of Virginia ... that is to say, Charles when dressed as a woman. He was shown posing before a car, standing on the porch of a house, and in other shots that would indicate a normal woman's role.

Thumbing through issues of the magazine that were unfamiliar to me, he showed me similar poses. The magazine itself, usually about eighty pages, was composed of articles, case histories, some fiction, poems, and editorials.

But it was obvious that one of the big selling features of the magazine was its pages of photographs. There were usually from eight to twelve such pages, each having from three to four photos of what seemed to be women. They were not women, of course, but men decked out to pass as women, and the captions would identify them only by the female names they had selected to

cloak their identities, even as Charles utilized Virginia.

The photos were varied. Perhaps about a quarter of them would have passed the discerning eye as women. Compared to the majority, the pictures of Virginia were remarkably successful.

We talked, as I said, and we felt a keen affinity for each other. I may have been the merest tyro, he the worldly expert, and yet there was no doubt we had certain elements in common. We talked for an hour, then went out to a restaurant for supper, and talked for an hour and a half there. Afterward we returned to my motel and talked until after midnight.

We talked of everything. We talked about cybernetics, heredity, love and marriage, religious influence, the machine age, automation, peace and war, books, and chemistry. I found that I was talking with a well-rounded intellect, a man who had earned a Ph.D. degree in Biochemistry, and was obviously a sharp and original thinker.

And of course we talked about ourselves. Of myself, there wasn't much to say, but he told me a lot about himself and the cross he had had to bear.

He had been addicted to cross-dressing since a boy. He had utilized every opportunity to dress in public, such as amateur theatricals and masquerade parties, in order to wear feminine clothes and play a girl's part. He had been afflicted with guilt that all transvestites experience in their early days; he had tried to quit the habit many times, destroying his secret hoard of clothes, only to find himself buying new ones all over again a month or two later. He had married, he had a son, but the marriage had gone on the rocks. He had been

named as a transvestite in the divorce proceedings, pilloried in the newspapers through such headlines. He had married again, this time to a woman who knew of his problem in advance and had accepted it.

He had tried to find a cure through psychiatry. He had gone to four different psychiatrists at four different times, and each one had failed; they had not only failed to cure him, but obviously were grossly ignorant of the whole thing. Finally he had found one, a great man in the field, who had told him that there was no known cure, that he should try to live with it as best he could and make himself his own niche in the world. This he was trying to do, and apparently succeeding. He owned his own business, some sort of factory in the chemical field, and he had prospered.

He had launched his magazine a couple years before in order to help bring some enlightenment to the world on what had hitherto been a misunderstood and very hush-hush sexual phenomenon. He did not consider it a sexual deviation, though it is usually so classified in texts.

Charles had ways of putting it that I have since heard him use many times in speech and in writing, so I will quote: "They confuse gender with sex. I am always a male, by sex, but as Virginia I am feminine in gender." "A transvestite may be a lady in the living room, but is always a man in the bedroom." "I am feminine from the waist up, but masculine from the waist down."

What of the homosexual queens? He scoffed. They are not of us. They are confused with us by the public, and they give us a bad name, but their drive is totally different from our drive. They are not interested in passing as women, or being associated with women. They

are only interested in advertising their bodies to other men by the crude technique of wearing women's clothes, but always in such a way as to exaggerate, to carry on, to reveal that they are only mock women, men in skirts, flaunting themselves to show their real sex and their real intentions. These queens conduct themselves as harlots, but transvestites identify with ladies and carry themselves with propriety.

Among the material I obtained from Charles that evening was a four-page leaflet he had written to explain the subject to the curious. Since what he said is the same as what he wrote there, I will quote:

> There are at least four distinct ways in which transvestites differ from homosexuals.
>
> 1. Transvestism is an individual personality expression while homosexual expression requires two people. Homosexuals, therefore, have to reveal themselves to get a partner; transvestites don't have to and they don't.
>
> 2. Practically no transvestite would advise, permit, or help another to become a transvestite—he knows the price too well and has suffered too much to wish it on another. Homosexuals, however, have no hesitation about indoctrinating and initiating others into the practice.
>
> 3. A homosexual individual is what he is all the time, day and night—his personality is constantly what it is. A transvestite alternates personalities—he is masculine as a male and performs as such, but he is feminine as his "other self" and in large measure forgets his male life.

> 4. Many, though by no means all, homosexuals have a somewhat effeminate manner of behavior and this is necessary to them, since they are, in effect, taking the female role all the time. The transvestite, on the other hand, shows no effeminacy in his male role. He doesn't need to—he is in fact two personalities, each sufficient unto itself.
>
> These four factors are far more important as differences to distinguish between these two forms of behavior than is the single thing they have in common, namely that some (by no means all) homosexuals also favor feminine attire. There is also the matter of motive to consider: the transvestite adopts feminine garb as a matter of internal expression—the homosexual does so for external effect—the easing of guilt on the part of himself and/or his partner.

I listened to this and discussed it with him. There were many elements of his thinking I did not entirely accept, but I was in the position of one who had a lot to learn and he in the position of the advanced scholar. I was willing that evening, and the next time also, to hear and try to understand, but not yet to dispute.

Nevertheless, there were things he said which did not sound right to me. Perhaps, then, I was not truly a transvestite? For instance, what was this about dual personality? He said that Virginia was a different personality than Charles. That "she" thought differently, had a different temperament, spoke differently, and was a suppressed secondary personality, a sort of Jekyll-

Hyde relationship, save that instead of good and evil, it was masculine and feminine.

From his magazine it was obvious that his philosophy embodied this as a basic principle. Somehow transvestites were men with suppressed feminine personalities and their dressing was an effort at self-expression by the "girl within." There was that line in his leaflet in point three: "in large measure forgets his male life." Forgets? That's a dangerous word.

I never for an instant supposed that I had a second personality capable of "forgetting" the male me. Dressed, or whatever, I was always me, and the act of cross-dressing signified to me an act of male eroticism, not female self-expression. Mentally I rejected this line of reasoning. It was not true—for me. Was I then a tiny minority, or was Charles deceiving himself? I indexed the question in my mental card file for future investigation.

When Charles finally left, after setting up the date I described in my opening chapter, I thumbed through the magazines he had left. He stated his purpose as publisher in each issue. It too is worth quoting:

"To provide *expression* for those interested in the subject of unusual dress and fashion. To provide *information* to those who, through ignorance, condemn that which they do not understand. To provide *education* for those who see evil where none exists."

With that I could agree. But was the sort of information and education he was providing entirely accurate? And where would such enlightenment lead? Could transvestism ever be made respectable?

Chapter Four

I carried away from that evening various impressions of Charles. He was a positive type of man, the kind of debater who did not easily concede any point, not perhaps the easiest kind of man to hold an affable difference of opinion with. He showed only a slight sense of humor, and this mostly in a sort of mocking cynicism about people and ideas with which he did not agree.

I had looked for evidence of effeminacy, and had not found much. As a businessman, I felt he'd be a sharp customer to deal with. As a man, he was somewhat sloppy in his dress, his tie rather poorly done up, and his shirt a bit ill-fitting. Evidently he did not regard his male personality as worth treating to any sartorial splendor. As Virginia he worked at being perfectly groomed; as Charles he was quite the opposite.

Were there external evidences of a transvestite about

Charles? I had studied him for such. There was one very obvious giveaway. His nails were overly long and pointed, purely feminine in grooming. His hair which at first seemed simply slicked back could be spotted on observation as overly long, too. It was apparent after a while that he could comb that hair differently, fluff it up, tease it a bit, and its length would permit a short bobbed effect that might pass as a woman's. It was long beyond normal male lengths. In fact, at one point a strand got loose from the slicked down back-combing and began to float around his ear—and as he tucked it back, he smiled and said, "A bit of Virginia is expressing itself."

And what of Virginia? That evening with her produced one curious anatomical enigma. I mentioned that the dress she wore was sufficiently low cut to reveal a distinct cleavage. Virginia during the evening had mentioned with pride how she passed even the warned eye.

Virginia had founded a club in Los Angeles called the "Hose and Heels Club." It had about twenty members, and they met once or twice a month, and many members would bring their wives along. At one such dress-up meeting, the club had invited a psychologist to attend as their guest. The doctor did so, arriving to find himself in a room with about twenty-five people in it, everyone in dresses, heels, and made up as women. About a third were actually women—wives and friends.

After the doctor had gotten his bearings, someone took him aside and asked him to guess the real sexes of those present. According to the story, the doctor did fairly well, guessing nearly all the men present, but

he failed to identify Virginia. He was sure that Virginia was a natural woman.

When Virginia told me that, I accepted the story for one reason. I saw a number of points by which the doctor or anyone else suspicious enough might have detected Charles, but there was one clincher that seemed to positively prove Virginia female. It was that incredible cleavage. It appeared deep, it was unquestionably real flesh, and it seemed impossible to achieve except by presupposing actual breasts.

I wondered at that time how it was done. I am not sure even to this day what the answer is. I have been told that it is a painful process of tightly bandaging the loose flesh of the male chest adding to the slight normal bustiness of the middle-aged man. It hardly seems a sufficient explanation for the effect achieved. And I have seen this same remarkably convincing decolletage on much younger men.

As I was about to take my leave of Virginia on the traumatic evening that ended my visit to California, I asked how I could make the acquaintance of someone in New York City. I did not want to be alone in my home town; I needed to make a friend or two during the next period of my life. I wanted someone to talk to, to advise me, to befriend me.

Virginia hesitated. Bob Stevens, listening, snapped his fingers, and said, "How about Gail?" Virginia nodded. "Yes, I think Gail is the person."

"How do I meet Gail?" I said. That would be easy enough now that I had passed Virginia's scrutiny. Send Gail a letter in care of the personal contact section of the magazine. They'd clear it through and it would be

up to this Gail whether "she" wished to meet me.

"But it would be easy enough to meet Susanna," added Virginia. Susanna, I knew, was a corresponding editor of the magazine, and was also a New Yorker. Susanna was bold enough to have had "her" address published in the magazine, and apparently was a sort of central personage in the East, even as Virginia was in the West.

I nodded. I could find Susanna myself, but somehow that made me just as uneasy as the original effort of contacting Virginia. As it turned out, it was six months before I finally met Susanna. I met Gail within a month.

But first would come the task of telling my wife.

I returned home from California in a somewhat different mental state from the condition I had been in when I flew out there. On the flight out I was feverish, obsessed, driven by guilty desires, extremely nervous, held under tight control stretched to the limit. By my two meetings and the study of the magazines I had acquired—I bought a complete back file of the magazine —I had alleviated a good deal of this initial tension, but I had replaced it by a different sort of drive.

That evening with Virginia had created a neurotic trauma. I lived it over and over again in my thoughts, every minute intense and sharp. The conversations we had held—the first time in my life I had ever dared discuss my most intimate secret aloud—had made indelible impressions. Yet from the start I had found myself not in entire accord with Charles. This girl-within theory of his . . . I couldn't buy it. And, again, was he typical or atypical of the average transvestite? Could I call my

drive to a halt at that point, just be satisfied with the meeting and go no farther?

I think that this question is the crux of most men's guilt problems. There is not a transvestite, open, concealed, or suppressed, who does not fight this question at all times. I had fought it to a standstill for four decades until I lost the first and most important entrenchment. Would my psyche now continue in stubborn retreat, giving up position after position to the irrational compulsive desire to cross-dress, to impersonate the other sex?

I did not know the answer to that question then. Consciously I kept telling myself, this far and no farther. But deep down I knew I was falling back and could not stop.

I could go no farther without acquainting my wife of my desires—of the one secret of my life she had never learned, never even suspected. This was the psychic bomb that had to be exploded.

From reading a few personal accounts it was plain that this revelation could shatter a marriage. It had shattered many. Many women could not tolerate the idea and had carried their intolerance to the point of divorce.

What of my wife? I had discussed this briefly with Bob Stevens as I had left Virginia's. I had thought then that she would never tolerate the idea. He said go carefully, tread softly, but tell her bit by bit.

My wife and I have been happily married for two decades. We are blessed by a great compatibility, we have been through crises of various sorts—domestic

and financial—and we have found ourselves in almost complete harmony. But ours had never been a spectacularly romantic affair. Both of us basically shy where emotional involvement was concerned, our love life had been moderate, satisfactory, but not always unfrustrated.

In the previous two or three years there had been a considerable improvement in our marital relationship. The stress and shift of my life had brought about a change in me that I have thought of as a shift into a sexual overdrive. This had been manifested in our love life and had greatly increased our emotional unity. There was surely no time in our life when we had been more in love.

The same overdrive had brought about a couple of minor manifestations which could serve as a wedge for the gradual opening up of my sensual desires. I had made the first beginnings of my seeking for tactile sensuality by changing over the year before to nylon tricot underwear, which had finally been introduced by men's wear makers. My wife had been mystified by this but had accepted it, though insisting with that curious logic women have that nylon tricot is hot and therefore not as pleasant for warm weather as cotton. One wonders why she did not apply it to her own undergarments, but somehow what is logical for the male is not logical for the female.

The second point was that I took an interest in her nightwear and got her to buy some gaudier and fancier nightwear than she ever had before. This she accepted without too much argument. I was, of course, transferring my secret desires to her.

My wife is a highly intelligent woman, a college

graduate with wide mental horizons. And I think she was aware that I had been in some sort of depressed mental state the months before.

I determined to tell her, to reveal to her all that I had suffered, and was suffering. But I would do it little by little, as painlessly as possible, until she was able to go along with me in this sickness, for sickness it surely was at that time.

My start was to tell her I had met a most unusual person, a crackpot perhaps, and yet a man of standing and intelligence. I told her of meeting this interesting person who liked to dress as a woman occasionally in his home.

This was the day after my return home. She was bemused, and her first remark was that she had never heard of transvestism. I explained what it was, and she commented that it sounded repugnant. We talked about it a bit more. I did not identify myself with it, but showed my tolerance for the hospitality of my unusual host of the West Coast. As we talked, I could see her going through a rapid readjustment of her views.

Later that night, continuing the discussion, I was pointing out that psychologists agree that there is no such thing as a 100 per cent male or a 100 per cent female. There is some femininity in every man and some masculinity in every woman. She suddenly broke into my train of thought:

"Oh, that's a lot of rubbish. The truth is that people are all just people and all have much the same desires. Women are just people and men are just people and they have much more in common than they have apart.

People make much more to-do about this than it ever called for."

And then she added as an afterthought, "After all, you like nylon tricot underwear yourself. So what?"

As I went to sleep that night I realized that the task of telling her about myself was not going to be impossible after all.

Progress turned out to be astonishingly rapid, now that I look back on it. It took about ten days all told, in further conversations, to work around to my own relationship to the matter. She rapidly became aware that I had been more than just an innocent, wide-eyed spectator at a bizarre dinner party. In about a week I had brought her to understand that there were things in women's wear that I was hungering to own for myself.

Twelve days after this initial conversation, my wife met me for lunch in town on a workday and we went shopping for nightgowns in my size. With the curiously practical attitude women have, she would not buy just anything; and we made the rounds of the lingerie departments of three large Fifth Avenue department stores to find just the color and styles that attracted me most and—as is always the case with transvestites—they were far and away the most feminine.

Now these were not the first feminine garments I had ever bought, but they were the first I was to really possess. The occasional item I had bought in past years had been worn once or twice, hidden, and finally and invariably gotten rid of. This time I could wear these gowns at home, if and when I felt the need, with only the proviso that the children never know or suspect. I

was and am in complete agreement with that limitation.

It must be pointed out that my wife was not unmoved nor without her own traumatic concerns, which in her way she was mainly keeping from me. She asked that evening just how far I would go. I could only answer that I did not know.

The next step would have to involve contact with others in New York.

Chapter Five

Before setting out actually to meet transvestites in my own city—men whose names and backgrounds would be entirely unknown to me but who might include future friends and confidants—I asked myself how much did I actually know of them? The answer was that I knew a good deal about the kind of people they might be from the magazine that Virginia published.

Since issue number five the magazine had featured what it called a "cover girl." This would be a good or reasonably good cover photograph of someone who was a successful enough impersonator to look the part of a presentable, often even beautiful, girl or woman. The main story would be an article by that "cover girl" telling the reader something of the personal history—how he started dressing, to what he ascribed it (if he did attempt self-analysis), what kind of troubles he

had gone through, how he adjusted, and something of what he was like now.

These stories would be signed only by a single feminine name—the kind of signature found throughout the volume. The real name of the man in question was a matter of the deepest security and as a rule, there would be not any identifying information as to the home location or even the business or professional standing.

There usually would be another such case history in the book and at least one short story or continued fictional piece.

A transvestite short story is a literary phenomenon in itself. Basically its main purpose is to describe how some male began to wear girls' clothing, how he came to like it, how he got away with it. If read by a non-transvestite, it must surely be a story without much point or merit. I imagine it would be a bore to anyone not attuned to that style of erotic thinking.

Such stories are revealing as to the type of fantasy-excuses transvestites indulge in to justify themselves. All too often, the cross-dressing incident would be something compulsory—a boy compelled to don girls' clothes for some reason beyond his will to refuse. Punishment, a special role in a play, a bet he lost, or so on. The twist would be that, once clad in petticoats and dresses, the boy would find it strangely enjoyable, and then would seek to repeat the experience.

The author's ingenuity in writing these stories was demonstrated in his ability to find new and better excuses to logically change clothes. A special feature would be the time spent in describing the actual garments, their

material, their cut, and so forth, sometimes reading like a fashion column out of a ladies' magazine. Another almost essential ingredient would be the presence of women—women who would accept the transformation, aid and abet it, and love the person doing it.

This factor, always present, was an infallible indication of the essential heterosexuality of the transvestite. Dress as women they might, but they wanted to be liked by women, to be loved by women. In truth, they emulated women not as rivals—as might the fairy queens—but as seekers of love and admiration, as allies perhaps, but always with desire for the feminine.

There would be articles in the magazine. Sometimes these would be popularized scientific material on the psychology involved—often reprints from responsible doctors or psychologists. Some articles would recount true experiences in cross-dressing. In one instance a Catholic monsignor had been asked to give his opinion on whether transvestism was a sin. He had done so, giving the act neither blessing nor condemnation, but pointing out that sin was an individual matter of thought and intent, and that there was no official church doctrine specifically dealing with this problem.

There were two columns: one by Virginia usually dealt with his philosophy and suggestions for conduct, and one by Susanna of New York, which tended to be more gossipy, often filled with bits of tantalizing news about what such and such a "girl" did and bits of Susanna's own philosophy which tended to be less pedantic than the editor's and which often stressed what Susanna called the desire of the "girl within" to manifest herself.

There would be a service page listing available ma-

terial; where to buy wigs, clothing made to order, and suchlike. A personals column would carry coded requests for correspondence.

Often there were poems of various lengths and quite a number of cartoons. The latter usually were cribbed from professional cartoonists, but captions were changed to give special slants. Occasionally a few pages would be devoted to letters from readers, almost all of which would indulge in a little self-analysis.

So if you read all the back issues, you could learn quite a lot about the way transvestites said they acted and thought. You could look over the photos and see dozens of readers at what they considered their best. Generally those photos showed signs of being carefully posed, and often gave evidence of being self-taken, behind locked doors.

Most transvestites revealed male elements, to judge from their pictures. Try as they might there would be a matter of height, or large feet, or a heavy face—the chin line was often a giveaway. But there were those—the cover girls, for instance—who often succeeded in "passing."

One of the two issues I had bought before meeting Virginia was the first of the cover girl series, featuring someone called Annette. This person managed to be quite good, seemed to have a smiling personality, and gave an interesting and unusual history. He was a married man, somewhere in the Pacific Northwest (to judge from a small correspondence ad he had elsewhere), whose wife had gone along with his dressing, whose mother had been informed and also had come to accept it. But Annette also wrote of periods of melancholy, of worry, of personal concern. All this turmoil had apparently been overcome.

I mention this particular cover girl for a reason which will be made clear later. He interested me from the start.

However, what concerned me when I was considering making personal contact were the items mentioning the New York people. Where New York contacts were concerned, it appeared that the magazine's Contributing Editor, Susanna, was the key.

Susanna ran a unique institution. Somewhere upstate, miles north of New York City, there was a summer resort that Susanna either owned or shared with Susanna's wife. This was called the Chevalier D'Eon Resort, taking its name from the famous transvestite of two hundred years ago who had been a nobleman high in the service of one of the French kings.

This resort, evidently isolated, out of sight of the main roads, was a spacious place where men could go on weekends—or in summer for as long as they wanted—and dress entirely in women's clothing and wigs. Here they did not have to confine themselves to locked bedrooms or to slipping out on daring excursions through dark deserted streets. Here those fortunate enough to have access to it could go out in the sunlight, walk about on grass and among trees, sit on the porch, and stroll around playing the role of women, in wigs, make-up, in their favorite dresses, or blouses and skirts.

Many of the photos of the Easterners had been taken against the woods and lawns of this mysterious resort. Many of the anecdotes in Susanna's column or bits of other persons' case histories would mention this resort. As many as a dozen or more had been known

to gather there on weekends and impersonator shows had been staged as well as amateur theatrics.

If there was a place where transvestite friendships were made and sealed, it evidently was at this resort and, during the winter, at the New York home of the resort's operator, Susanna and wife. The wife, it could be determined, was in the wig business in New York—she advertised in the magazine—and through her professional work, many persons apparently made contact.

When I bade goodbye to Virginia, he had suggested that I could drop in at this wig shop and make my own contact. The thought chilled me, for at that time such a full impersonation element as a wig was far from my mind.

At the time of my return to New York, I had only limited objectives—to acquire some bits of clothing to satisfy my erotic interests and to meet one or two local people to satisfy my curiosity and my need for someone to talk to about this.

I had been given the name of a Gail. From bits in Susanna's column, this Gail was clearly one of the inner circle of the resort and the friends that had grown out of it. I knew various names from the news and gossip columns and the blurry photographs: Felicity, Rae, Karen, Rita, Edith, Sandy, and others.

Behind these girls' names there must be real people —men—living men's lives, working, worrying, responsible, yet hiding a dual life unknown to the metropolis they moved in.

Who were they? What were they like?

I was afraid, I admit it freely. I was afraid to plunge myself into this world, and yet I could not resist the

temptation. They fascinated me and they horrified me at the same time. Would I like them? Would they repel me?

I talked it over with my wife. She seemed worried but did not raise any absolute objections. "Be careful," she said. "Don't do anything foolish. Don't get involved."

I said I was old enough and sensible enough to be able to handle myself in a crisis. I had to know, and I felt it would not be taking too much of a chance. I had a post office box, I would use a nom de plume; thus I would be reasonably protected.

I wrote letters to Susanna and to Gail. I asked Susanna about the resort and sent her a couple of prints of the pictures I had taken of Virginia several weeks before.

I asked Gail whether we could arrange a meeting. The letter to Gail had to go to Los Angeles, there to be forwarded back to New York.

I waited for an answer.

Chapter Six

I heard from Susanna first. The letter was on pink stationery, with the feminine name and address on top—very much the typical lady's letterhead. It was typed; it was chatty and quite friendly. Let me quote from it:

> I guess you must know quite a bit about me if you have followed my opinions and adventures through our magazine. I most certainly would like to make your acquaintance and chit-chat a bit about our favorite subject . . . Would love to meet you for lunch . . . Why don't you give me a ring at home any nite or morning . . . I would love to have you meet me for lunch as my real self, but inasmuch as it will imply a lunch hour during a working day, I'm afraid I'll have to delegate the pleasure of meeting you to my "twin brother" . . . unless we could meet at my dressmaker's . . . In the meantime, receive the very best from Susanna.

The letter also mentioned the setup for the resort that spring and summer, rates and so forth. But what got me was that business about "my real self." I knew this one's philosophy—that the feminine role was the role the writer preferred to assume. The line about the twin brother is transvestite jargon. It means the man in his normal role. The type of advanced person this Susanna was carried this thing along on a twenty-four-hour-a-day level.

Setting a date for lunch would not be easy to carry off. I'd have to arrange time to get away from the office and meet a total stranger at some midway point between the two offices (and I did not know his address and he did not know mine). Well, I'd see about it.

The answer from Gail did not come until a week or so after hearing from Susanna. Meanwhile I did nothing. I was strangely hung up mentally. I was still in a feverish state. I was unable to resolve just how far I would ever be likely to go, or even how far I wanted to go. I would lie awake nights trying to put two and two together and never finding any simple solution. It was plain only that I would have to meet others, to talk to others, and to listen, and then talk, and talk. The fountain of self-guilt, of temptation and unorthodox desire, was in full flow. I rode with its current.

The letter from Gail came to my post office box early in April. I read it with concern, anticipation, and the fever of a man on the edge of the diving board. A visit to Virginia was a once-a-year affair of a stranger in a strange city. A visit to this Gail would quite possibly begin a regular association. It was something to be concerned about.

Gail wrote:

> Having had a note from Barbara following your visit on the coast, I have been anticipating your letter.
>
> Much of our experience seems to be similar, as you said ... I am in my forties, married and a father (but now separated). Our principal difference is, I believe, only in timing. I made contact, as you put it, about a year and a half ago which has greatly accelerated my participation, which I view, at the same time, as both good and bad. More of this, ad infinitum, if experience is any judge, when we meet.
>
> Why don't you call me? Perhaps you can stop by some evening after work.

It was signed by a man's name, gave the home address, and both home and office phones. I read the letter carefully several times. My wife read it. It looked honest; it did not sound as strange as Susanna's.

Perhaps I am psychic at times. Or perhaps my senses, raw and on edge, were particularly sensitive to the faintest of impressions—more so than they are now. But there was a faint impression of plaintiveness, of someone just a little bit troubled in that note. I noticed it, or rather I seemed to feel it, and my wife also seemed to sense it.

I decided to call this man, and go over in the evening a day or two hence. My wife was uneasy, but did not say not to. She voiced another worry, "How do you know this isn't all a blackmail racket? A syndicate of crooks trying to trap victims?"

I scoffed at this. On the surface it was possible, but to be a transvestite is to know that this is almost impossible for others who are similarly burdened. For transvestism is a lonely and guilt-ridden thing and it somehow could not be that the type of cold callous crook who would try such blackmail could successfully worm his way in. The effort would not be worth it, actually.

I phoned Gail. A pleasant voice answered, masculine, deep, well enunciated. I made a date to drop over to his apartment in midtown Manhattan the next evening, about eight o'clock.

When I started off the next night I was cool, as I have been on other difficult assignments. I drove into Manhattan, looked for a parking spot in the fashionable East Side neighborhood, and all the time I was trying not to think of my date. I parked, walked back to the tall apartment house. I felt uneasy and filled with a certain excitement. Well, we would see.

The apartment was high up. A doorman let me in, an elevator man took me up. I thought to myself; do you know that someone lives in this house who goes out disguised as a woman? Do you know that a man lives in this house who appears as a woman behind the locked door of an apartment you see every day? No, they didn't, and already I was entering into the unknown world that lies at the borderline between the sexes. I was beginning to get an inkling of the bizarre behavior that hides behind everyday fronts.

I rang the apartment bell. There were footsteps, and my host opened up, let me in. At least one aspect would not be too tense. Gail had not made the feminine

transformation. It was a man to whom I would talk.

He was a short man, about five six, graying hair, a bit stocky, but quite good-looking. Sharp gray eyes and a somewhat quizzical smile took the edge off my concern. His voice was deep and masculine and his handshake was strong. No faggot this.

Conversation got off easily. He started by saying that he hadn't known whether to dress or not. He had thought of it, but he decided against it the first time we met. I agreed, said it might have proven rather upsetting to me to meet someone who was in disguise the first time. He arched his eyebrows at that. Evidently the idea that total female impersonation would have been a disguise struck him as new. Transvestites don't think of it in that terminology. (They really don't. This I know now.)

To be in full feminine appearance is to be "dressed." That's another term of tv jargon. And the word "tv," pronounced teevee, that's another. Everyone, I soon found out, used the phrase tv. It was shorter, it was simple, and if accidentally overheard by an outsider it would be mistaken for someone talking about television or television people.

I will not try to reconstruct that entire evening. Much time has passed and the person known as Gail is a good friend of mine today. I have met him in both male and female appearance so often that I could not now separate exactly what I learned then from what I learned later, nor what we discussed then from what we discussed later.

But there are some first impressions one does not ever lose. One was that my psychic impression from his letter was not wrong. From the first there was something about Gail, there is still that something, which struck a plain-

tive note. He has an air of amused self-negation about him which is rarely kept hidden long.

His apartment was spacious though obviously a bachelor's and very well appointed, but not femininely so. We talked. We talked a lot and for the most part we talked fairly freely. This is characteristic of tvs. They warm to each other at once and the need to talk to another about their mental fixation is extremely strong, having been pent up as long as it has. There is no better alleviation for guilt than confession—as both priest and analyst will tell you—and this is something that tvs do instinctively when they are with sympathetic people.

Gail talked about himself. He was estranged from his wife, but not divorced. He had been living separately for about a year and he had been devoting more and more of his time to the world of transvestites in New York, centering around Susanna, "her" coterie of friends, and the resort. He talked of this, not as something to take pride in, but something that preyed on his mind. It was a matter of guilt that he had been unable to pull himself out of it. He loved what he was doing and he hated himself for doing it.

He was an expert and advanced cross-dresser. He pulled out a stack of photographs and we sorted through them. I kept several of the duplicates, and he mentioned that photography was a mania of transvestites in the early stages. I understood perfectly, because I was dying to take pictures of tvs. I had shot a roll of film in Virginia's house that initial evening and it had only teased my fast-growing appetite. There is something weirdly compelling about the idea of taking pictures of men posing as women. Often the photo is more convincingly

feminine than the actual three-dimensional person is. Pictures are deceiving and we wanted to be deceived.

There was also an imp that wanted to take photographs of myself. I had never dressed completely—had still no conscious desire to do so—and yet the idea of trying it for photography was a devil that could not be dismissed.

It was common to all, to judge from the piles of pictures Gail showed me. There they were, in color, standing on lawns, posing on stages, gathering around a table playing cards.

Gail was a habitué of the resort. He had spent weekend after weekend up there, dressed as a woman. I asked how that had been. He said, "At first, when the idea was suggested, I scoffed. I said how could you keep excited for two days straight? And it was true—you don't. The excitement goes away in a couple of hours and then you just settle down and play the part. It gets to be a habit and you hardly notice it. But when it comes time to go back to the city, it's often a strain to resume male ways. It takes a day or so to get over the habit of thinking about smoothing your skirt when you sit down. You have to consciously resume your normal ways. It worries me when that happens. I wonder what I am sinking into and can I control it?"

He spoke of many things, chit-chatted, gossiped. I learned that there were personal frictions in the tv world he ran around in, just as there were in all social groups. He was mad at someone called Felicity.

Felicity (I had seen his pictures and I knew a little about him) was a man of about six foot two, in his early fifties, who was a licensed airplane pilot. He was still flying the regular airliners, and would drop into town on

his returns—though his regular home was out of town. I gathered from Gail's comments that Felicity supposed that he passed everywhere around town as a woman. Gail was of a different opinion. "Felicity gets read everywhere," he said, "but nobody has bothered him, so he doesn't know it."

There's another tv jargon term. "To be read" is to be spotted as a man in woman's clothing. Next to being arrested, it's the worst thing that can happen to a tv.

This Felicity had brass, I was told, which was not unexpected of a person who had been a test pilot in his youth and was still engaged in a hazardous occupation. He went everywhere dressed as a woman, and his appearance was something less than beautiful. He was big, he was middle-aged, he was bold. He would go into ladies' shops and buy dresses and insist on trying them on. He once walked up to a policeman in Times Square, handed him a camera, and asked if the cop would take his picture, so that Felicity could show "the other girls back in Texas." The policeman smilingly obliged and snapped this pseudo-Texan against the bright lights of Broadway. When he handed the camera back his only comment was, "My, they grow big women in Texas."

Gail was angry at Felicity for something that the big pilot had pulled on him. "We had arranged a dinner date in the city at a restaurant my folks had patronized since I was a small boy. Everyone knows me there. I had asked Felicity and his wife and daughter down, and I had made Felicity swear that he wouldn't come dressed.

"But after I got there first, reserved a table, and was sitting there, in this character walks, dressed to the teeth as Felicity, wig, gown, heels, and all, and trailed by his

wife and daughter. I could have sunk through the floor. To make matters worse, Felicity is somewhat hard of hearing and talks very loudly. I suffered through that meal sure that everyone in the restaurant knew what I was with, and I was sure the waiters were nudging each other and whispering about it. I swore then I'd never get caught in public with Felicity again, no matter what he says, and I've never shown my face in that restaurant again either."

The evening was pleasant and I picked up all sorts of information. Gail took a lot of chances, but claimed that he was always being dragged into them by others. He did not usually go out dressed, because he was sure the doorman and others would spot him. But there was a time when a friend, Sandy, had escorted him up to Susanna's apartment one evening. Sandy wasn't dressed, but had talked Gail into dressing at home. Then they went down in the service elevator (self-run) and let themselves out the service entrance and Sandy drove them up to the gathering. The party broke around one in the morning and Sandy drove Gail home. At this point Gail remembered that after midnight you had to ring for the night doorman to let you in, your key would not work.

There was a moment of mad desperation, and then the only course to follow was to ring. Sandy had already driven off, and Gail was standing there, to the outward eye, a woman. The doorman came to the door, unlocked it—*and without a glance at the strange woman*—let her in and went away.

That had been the closest squeak that Gail had experienced so far. We talked more. I learned bits and details about tvs I had known only through the magazine. Gail

took me to a closet, showed me how his vast array of dresses were on racks. "I have a girl come in once a week to clean the place and I keep this closet locked. Once I came back and found that I had failed to lock the closet. It was left open, just as I had left it the night before. But the girl never said a word about it."

When it came time to leave, Gail asked me to call again, to come over when I could. He was moving to an apartment in Greenwich Village in a week or so. He'd be able to move about with greater facility there, and since transvestism occupied so much of his life, that would be important.

I left feeling I had met a friend. I drove home, calm, and filled with thoughts of the astonishing secret world I had come into. My wife was still up when I got home—evidently she had been worrying about me.

I told her about my visit and she listened without saying much. I offered to show her the photos Gail had given me and she snapped a refusal. She didn't like the idea of my getting involved—she was afraid, I knew, not for me, but of them.

My problems with my wife were far from over. My problems with myself were equally unresolved. I had heard some astonishing stories, but I could not visualize myself taking part in such adventures. There was indeed a certain dead-end element in Gail's life. It was evident in everything he said and did that he looked back on each episode as something guilt-ridden. He was like a man on a toboggan slide—enjoying the sensation, unable to get off, and having no idea of what cliff or wall might lie at the bottom.

I saw Gail as a man laughing to cover up a desire to

scream, as joking to keep from crying, as running to avoid having to stop and look at himself. And yet he was a man of breeding, background, culture. He had intelligence, education, and ability; still his life was a series of frustrations and subtle disasters.

I like Gail. He is a friend of mine and of my wife today; yet this initial impression is still my view. I wish it were possible to help him.

Chapter Seven

Transvestism is no laughing matter. By now perhaps that is reasonably clear. Transvestism, far from being a joke, can be the deepest of tragedies.

It is tragic because it is compulsive. It is a fixation beyond the power of its victim to control. It must be played out. And it begins in early youth. It becomes tragic in adolescence. It kills.

There is not a police department in this country that could not produce records of young men who committed suicide while dressed in the clothes of the opposite sex. It happens all the time, in every state and city of this country. Often it makes small two-paragraph items in the newspapers. Just as often it does not. Suicide is sufficiently common and sufficiently disgraceful to the families of the victims that they bend every effort to keep the news out of print. Doubly so, when the boy of the family is found hanging dressed in panties and slip.

But the police know. And if you ask around of friends

and neighbors—discreetly, of course—you will eventually find someone who recalls such a case. It's frighteningly common. Because transvestism is more prevalent than you might suppose.

I know of two such cases that happened close enough to be known to people I know, although I did not know the boys. But within an orbit of a hundred people I know —relatives, business associates, or just friends—I found two items of this kind.

One happened a half dozen blocks from my home. The boy was attending the same school as a niece of mine. He was fifteen. My niece said he seemed like a perfectly normal schoolboy, nothing queer.

One evening the boy's mother and elder sister went to the movies. The boy preferred to stay home alone. The mother and sister returned home around twelve o'clock. They found the boy hanging from the shower curtain in the bathroom. He was wearing his sister's underwear and hosiery. No note, no record of any school problems, no apparent reason for his suicide, no reason that anyone could think of for his strange garb.

That's one story. The other incident happened in California. The lady who told it to me said this young man, aged sixteen, used to attend a social club in the neighborhood. She herself had seen him a week before. He was not to her knowledge in any way "queer." He was intelligent, sensitive, got good marks in school, and was apparently happy.

Nonetheless, as she recalls it, when she had seen him a week before, he had a strange raw bruised mark around his throat. He didn't explain it. She remembered it when she heard what happened the next Saturday.

He had gone out on a date with a girl; they had attended some sort of high school party, dancing and all that. He escorted the girl home—she said he seemed all right. He went home. His parents were out that night themselves, somewhere else.

They came home, and went to bed, presuming the boy was still out. Sunday morning, when they found his bed not slept in, they looked for him. They found him hanging in a utility shed. He was dressed in a girl's clothes, from the skin outwards, and wore lipstick. They never knew where the clothes had come from.

There isn't a transvestite who doesn't understand perfectly why these two boys hanged themselves. The temptation comes over all of us; fortunately most of us can throw it off. Because there is a time in our lives when we are convinced that we are entirely alone in the world. Nobody writes of transvestism, nobody discusses it, nobody knows about it.

When the storms of adolescence are upon such a young man, he is without map, pilot, or adult guidance. He feels this dreadful compulsion toward the clothing of the female sex. He cannot resist it. He must dress and he does dress. He may borrow his mother's clothing when she's not around, lock himself in his room, and try it on. Or he may try on his sister's clothing if he has a sister and her clothes will fit. Or try on high-heeled shoes. Or at that stage his fixation may be on the taboo subject of panties.

He gets an erotic thrill out of the secret dressing. He gets a sexual charge out of it. But afterward, he is consumed with guilt. He is ashamed of what he has done. He could not defend it. His mind fills with self-accusa-

tions, questions concerning his manhood, and he has no answers.

He tells himself that he would die of shame if anyone stumbled on him when so dressing. His guilt is surcharged. And he wonders about himself.

He asks himself if he is a homosexual. He does not like the idea. He does not feel that he is one. Still there is that irrational urge to dress like a woman—so perhaps he is a queer.

But he does not feel attracted toward men. He feels that if a man made an amorous pass at him he would be furious and strike out as any normal young man in his school or block would do. He does feel attracted to women. He likes girls. He wishes they would like him.

So after a while he cannot quite believe he is a homosexual, or if he has decided he is one, he cannot bring himself to do as they do. He is caught in an insoluble quandary. And he's sure that he's alone in the world. Who else would do such a strange thing—and like it? And how can you stop wanting to do what gives you such pleasure every once in a while—when the thought returns and makes its obsessional demand?

So he recognizes his quandary. He can't abide himself, he has lost a certain faith in his manhood, and he cannot establish his role in life. He could never justify what he is doing and the compulsion is growing. Sooner or later, he says, I am going to be found out. I have managed to steal clothes from the womenfolk, or maybe even buy bits of it in strange distant stores and hide it about the house. But suppose it is found—as found it must be some day? How can I live with it?

Then one evening, dressed in secret, his heart rising in his throat in mingled ecstasy and revulsion, enjoyment and shame, the thought of continuing to be unique in the world—with the inevitable discovery and agony that lie in his future—overcome him. The trapped mind like the trapped animal turns on itself.

The sensation of strangling, already there, suggests the next step. And probably without premeditation, he solves the conflict. He hangs himself.

They never leave notes. The note, the message, is on his body. He's wearing it for everyone to see.

Those transvestites who get past this stage—fortunately, I suspect, the majority—know it well. The shame and ecstasy of cross-dressing leave a mark of guilt upon our mental brows. Eventually we read what we can, we research the subject, and by and by we find the word that describes what interests us in some psychology text. The Hirschfeld Syndrome. Eonism. Transvestism. Once the key word is found, we hunt down all the books, read the miserable case histories, read the scant handful of uncomprehending and unsympathetic analyses of psychologists who draw conclusions on the basis of a few sick cases.

We still don't quite believe, but at least we have found out one thing. We are not alone. And we are not "queer." What we are we are not sure, but we exist, and maybe if we live long enough we can figure ourselves out. Or else say, "The devil take it, I'll make my own way and live my life as best I can without regard to what others think."

The guilt is there, though. It almost never goes away.

What is stamped into a person in infancy, childhood, and adolescence never entirely disappears.

Transvestism is not a laughing matter.

I've written this chapter now because I think it belongs in this book at this point. It is possibly the main reason why this book has been written. My wife said to me last year, "Somebody must tell about this. Somebody must do something to save those boys."

This is why transvestites seek each other out, when they can get the courage and security to do so. Because only by comparing notes, by talking out their fears and guilts with each other, can they help themselves. When two tvs meet, though they are total strangers, they feel instant camaraderie, and in a few minutes will be talking freely of subjects so intimate that even their wives and mothers never have known them. Psychiatrists cannot learn in months what tvs can learn of each other in hours.

There is almost nothing available that truly tells what it is to be transvestite. There are a few hastily compiled collections of articles from popular medical magazines . . . unorganized pieces, generally case histories, with analyses by different medical men whose ideas may conflict with each other. There are some histories of strange people like the Abbé de Choisy, the Chevalier d'Eon, and others—ancient stories without depth or comprehension. And some inaccurate trash in lurid magazines about men who had themselves operated on in Denmark or Casablanca and "changed their sex."

This is why the publication of a magazine by and for transvestites was a terrific breakthrough. Though that magazine has faults, is one-sided in its editorial slant, leaves much to be desired, it did represent a focal

medium for what one writer described as "the men Kinsey forgot."

In the relatively short period of that magazine's existence, triumphs already have been scored which must number more than all the help psychiatrists had given prior to that. The editor has letters in his files telling how marriages have been saved, how life became bearable, how suicides were averted.

Virginia, when I visited his place, showed me a scrapbook in which there were several pages of suicide clippings. The pattern was always as I've described it. I am told that the classic method of suicide for homosexuals is putting a pistol or rifle in the mouth and pulling the trigger. I prefer not to speculate on the reason for this method. But the classic pattern for transvestites is the rope. I think I have explained this.

Virginia told me of one instance that had happened just before my visit. He was not home, but his wife answered the phone. It was afternoon. A hysterical young man was on the wire. He had to talk about himself, about his fixation, he wanted to kill himself, had tried that morning, but in desperation had decided to make a wild last effort to find someone who could understand. Virginia's magazine operates out of a post office box. You couldn't speak to the editor—and it had to be that day, then, at once. But there was an ad in the magazine for a certain dressmaker. She had a business address. The frantic young man went there, told the dressmaker he had to speak to someone—to this Virginia. At first the dressmaker refused, as Virginia's phone was strictly confidential. Then, realizing the desperation involved, she herself dialed the private number. Virginia was out.

Virginia's wife answered and for an hour talked to the distraught young man, hearing his fears, explaining them, reasoning with him. She calmed him down, managed to alleviate his impulses; literally she saved his life.

As she said to me, "Here was I, the wife of an unknown man, a total stranger, hearing from his lips what he had never been able to discuss rationally with his mother and his newly wed wife. Here he was talking to me, nothing but a sympathetic voice on a phone, but for the first time in his life he had the rational audience he so desperately needed. This is why I go along with my husband in his work; this is why I stand beside him, because this is something that has to be done—and that nobody else in the world can do. When I think of the lives we have saved, of the homes we have salvaged, it is worth the agony."

That's why this book is being written. I want to make a record of the things I found out in heart-to-heart talks, I want to shed some light on a dark subject. Perhaps I am just egotistical enough to want to save a few lives and save a few homes, too.

Just one would be enough.

Chapter Eight

I had a great need to discuss my personal problems and thoughts in detail, and to put them into some sort of concrete form, such as could be obtained through correspondence. Talking with Gail had been a start, but I have found that there are things which perhaps can be stated more clearly through letters. Besides, it was apparent that Gail had already been through his phase of acute self-analysis and probably would be bored if I kept at him too long.

At the same time I made plans to visit Virginia I had undertaken to find someone with whom to correspond on the subject. I found it almost simultaneously with my first personal contact—in the form of a man in New England whom I shall call Gilbert.

Gilbert is not his name but it is a name associated with him, for he turned out to be the author of an astonishing group of stories which had been published by photo offset method in the last ten years. These booklets, four

in number, were produced by various anonymous publishers and could be found occasionally among the literature in the stores along New York's 42nd Street or Los Angeles' Main Street. They were unique productions —perfect examples of a certain type of transvestic fantasy.

The name Gilbert actually was the signature of the artist who had illustrated these works and they came to be known therefore by the artist's name. I had discovered these booklets several months before; they were quite compelling, embodying many of my own fantasies of early childhood. Primarily they dealt with what is known as petticoat punishment—that is, the idea of putting a naughty boy into girl's clothes for a day or a week in order to punish him by humiliation.

Petticoat punishment is no fantasy in itself—it was a fairly widespread practice in Victorian England, apparently continued at least up to the twenties, and references can be found to show that in isolated instances it is still the foolish notion of some mothers that it is a good punishment. As late as June, 1962, a judge in Orange, Texas, sentenced ten young boys brought before him for juvenile delinquency to spend a month in dresses, explaining that this thing had been done to him when a boy and had proven effective.

As any adult transvestite could have told the judge, this is a vicious and perverted practice. His reasoning is entirely false and what his ill-advised judgment may actually do is to make some man's life miserable with a transvestic humiliation fantasy for the rest of his days. But cure delinquency it will not, as a later news item testified when one of the boys a few weeks later doffed his skirts for the night to engage in a little burglary.

The way the plot usually ran in the Gilbert booklets was that a boy of about fourteen found himself entirely under the control of a woman, not his mother, who for one reason or another quickly put him into little-girl-type clothing, frilly, bouffant-petticoated, and with ruffled panties almost always visible. The plot then shows how the boy at first resents and is embarrassed by it but, after a rebellion, finds he actually likes the feel of it, secretly begins to enjoy it, and finally admits he likes it and wants to keep it up.

The artist, whoever he really was, obviously caught the spirit of the thing. The writer was adept at telling his tales. It turned out to be the man who wrote those stories who had struck up my first correspondence.

He was not a professional writer, I learned. He said he wrote these fantasies to relieve his own tensions, to imagine the act of dressing without having to go through it. Usually he destroyed his writings, but at the time those booklets appeared he had been in need of money and had turned them out for the publisher.

I found him a remarkable correspondent, quick to reply, deft with a word, seemingly honest in his appraisal of the situation and apparently frank concerning himself. He was a man in his middle sixties, retired, and one who had spent fifty years with transvestism. I wrote him concerning my uneasiness at making contact with the New York group. His advice was not to. I would be disappointed on meeting them, and I would find that they were all frustrated people who would add to my own sense of frustration.

This was a disturbing bit of advice, especially coming from one who apparently knew. Yet I felt that I had to

meet others in person, for I consider myself adult enough to judge people and to conduct my life with some caution. But I had already had one experience with sheer frustration—my first effort to meet the famous Susanna.

I had telephoned this person from my office one morning because he had rather odd working hours, and Susanna had answered. His voice was pleasant, easy, with a slight Spanish accent. Since he worked in the midtown district it would be quite easy to arrange a lunch date. We did so, setting up a meeting outside a certain restaurant at a specific hour. On the day set, I stood outside that restaurant for three-quarters of an hour scanning everyone who came along. Finally I realized that I had been stood up. To say I was frustrated would be an understatement. And Susanna did not bother to send any excuse or drop a single line of explanation.

Gilbert wrote: "Too bad about your luncheon date with Susanna, but I might opine that standing you up was a means of tickling her feminine ego. However, you might arrange to visit her apartment when there was a gathering of the 'girls.' I understand that it is a sort of Mecca for local and out-of-town tvs. The more you see of them and talk with them, the less desire you will have to ever join them in feminine attire. Most of those you meet, you will find are frustrated persons, using tv as a means of bringing attention to themselves, and hearing plaudits on how pretty they appear."

This was hardly encouraging advice, and I felt myself hanging on the sharp edge of indecision. Gilbert's opinions certainly conflicted with those of Virginia and with what I had learned in meeting with Gail.

I met Gail a couple times for lunch, still meeting him in his male appearance, of course. He talked about current doings in the circle, about going up to Susanna's resort, about his plans for moving his apartment. As soon as he was established, I could visit him. He was not able to account for Susanna's behavior.

Gilbert continued to be a fascinating if often frustrating correspondent. Frustrating in that he advised against all that I was set on doing, fascinating in his thoughts and reflections on his past. He had known over a hundred tvs quite well, had helped many even as had Virginia, and had evolved his own philosophy. He had been a married man, had had offspring, had separated, had been quite a successful businessman and social leader, and still enjoyed community standing.

His own cycle of dressing had evolved into a fixed rhythmic pattern. On the two days of the new moon each month he was at his tv height—on those nights, behind locked doors, he would dress himself in the same type of garments that he had been made to wear for punishment when he was nine years old. Petticoat punishment was not a fantasy for him. It had happened to him and it had made an indelible impression that he relived over and over again each month in the dark of the moon.

Because his fantasy called for wearing little-girl clothes of a bygone period, he had taught himself sewing over the years and had become an expert dressmaker, using his own sewing machine, patterns, and dummies. He made himself clothes in the styles worn by little girls of 1910, with loads of ruffles and frills, short, wide skirts, voluminous petticoats, and ruffled bloomers.

Apparently he would wear them once, posturing before a mirror without wig or make-up—the image of a boy in punishment garb. After the new-moon period was over, he would dispose of the clothes and later go to work making up a new pattern and stitching them together for the next cycle.

A complicated life indeed, but one he had been living for decades, filling it out with writing stories and extensive correspondence. And all this while living a normal daily life and maintaining a good masculine standing in his community.

I asked whether he had ever taken photographs, and he said he hadn't. Had he ever used a feminine name? Once again, "No." He wrote of his attitude toward tv:

> In my own humble opinion, a genuine transvestite is a person of normal intelligence who takes pleasure in wearing articles of female attire in order to sate his tension. If one is to study fashion during the centuries past, it will be found that it was always the male of the species who wore the colorful clothing, the silks and laces. Likewise in the animal and bird kingdoms, it is always the male who has the flaming plumage or other effects, while the female is more plain. Apparently Nature expected it to be that way.
>
> To me, there is nothing wrong in a man wishing to don frills as long as he does it as a male, and does not try to add make-up, hair pieces, etc., to create the impression he is a female. Many factual cases are to be found where perfectly normal males went about in petticoats, yet never pretended to be other than what they were. Several of these are written in the book *Eonism* by the eminent British psychologist. It is only

> where the male dons female attire with the desire to deceive that Society frowns on the practice. A male in petticoats making no attempt to conceal the fact that he is a male will probably bring laughter but nothing more. It was very rarely that I ever wore make-up or a wig when in the throes of my tension, and it was when I did so that I always experienced a guilt complex. Without it, it did not appear.

Which course for me? I hung that month in uncertainty, having taken initial steps both in Gail's direction and in Gilbert's. On the one hand, I had felt something of the curious "dead end" undertone that I imagined to be part of Gail's otherwise light-hearted surface appearance. I was very much intrigued by mention of the others and I very much wanted to see these people for myself. On the other hand, Gilbert's advice made a lot of sense. It was the advice of a man who had seen all and noticed all and managed to keep his life on an even keel—despite its bizarre aspects. One could not help seeing in his letters the mind of an intelligent, apparently calm and responsible person.

But was he really right about this wig and padding taboo? It seemed to me that he had somehow stuck in a half-in-half-out position. He felt guilt when totally disguised as a woman, the kind of total disguise which society would often let pass unnoticed and would find at least comprehensible. He did not feel guilt when he was making a mockery of his manhood in out-of-date childish dresses though his masculine face and haircut were visible. Of course, probably no one had seen him when so dressed but, as any tv could tell, the guilt is in the mind.

His actions were counter to the whole viewpoint expressed by Virginia and by everyone who wrote for his magazine. I suspected that Gilbert was a law unto himself and finally I realized that to take his advice would leave me frustrated permanently, would keep me behind the door which the drive of my sick unconscious had finally forced open.

I would continue my efforts to meet other tvs, and I would trust myself—and the steady keel of my beloved life companion, my wife—to see that I weathered the emotional storms which I was sure lay ahead of me.

Gail phoned to say he had moved, his new apartment was in passable shape, and why not drop down tomorrow night and pay a visit?

I did not realize that at the same time I would learn a few unsuspected facts about my trusted correspondent.

Chapter Nine

I think there is a sixth sense where sex is concerned. I think we are always subconsciously aware of the presence of a member of the opposite sex and that our actions operate in those circumstances under what might be described as a sort of psychic red alert. It has always been so for me, and I am sure it is so for everyone. Let there be but a single female in the room, all others male, and I am aware of this. Speech, action, thought are always conducted with this automatically in mind. Thus, in a crowd entirely of one's own sex, there is a different atmosphere, a different ease than where there is a mixture.

To the eye, there was a woman in the room. To the uninitiated there would be three men and a woman sitting around a small table sipping coffee and talking. I was one of the men, and I was puzzling over why I did not feel that sense of alertness to the opposite sex that I usually would have. I knew why, of course, but what

intrigued me was the curious lack of that alert when my eye kept registering the presence of a woman. My mind denied it.

The woman was my friend Gail. The place his new apartment in Greenwich Village. The time was an evening in May, and the occasion my first actual meeting with a New York tv dressed.

When I drove to the new address down in New York's famous Bohemian section, I was not sure that Gail would be dressed, but I suspected it. My friend had chosen well, for he had found a first floor apartment in a modern building which would permit him to come and go without passing the scrutiny of any elevator man or doorman. I rang. There was a soft chime inside the apartment. I heard a little click which indicated that someone was scrutinizing me through the one-way glass peephole, a murmur of voices, and the door opened sufficiently to let me slip through.

I faced a stranger, a young man, perhaps in his late twenties, normally dressed, who smiled and stuck his hand out and said, "I'm Rae. You must be . . ."

I introduced myself. We stepped into the main room of the apartment. Another man, even younger, perhaps about twenty-five, black-haired, slight, dark-eyed, nodded to me. He was introduced as Karen. This one spoke up, "Gail's dressing. She'll be here in a minute. Sit down." He had a soft Irish lilt.

The main room was well appointed. I recognized many of the furnishings from Gail's old apartment, with a giant wall-size mirror fronting a settee, a small table, several chairs, a kitchenette opening off this room. A short hall led into two other rooms.

We talked a bit, and then there was a step, a swish of skirt, and Gail came in. I looked and he was quite convincing. Those sharp gray eyes framed against a well-made-up face, the work of an expert if nonprofessional cosmetician, slim eyebrows, curled eyelashes, eyeliner and eyeshadow, lipstick, gentle coloration, beautifully coiffed brownish-black hair, form-fitting blue dress, very shapely indeed, narrow-waisted, wide-hipped, busty. Gail smiled—a good-looking woman of about thirty-five, perhaps ten years younger than the man I had met and lunched with—opened "her" mouth, and out came the deep masculine tones and no-nonsense voice of a man.

Well, I will admit it was a relief. Where Virginia put on a determined act of being a split personality and talking in a different voice, my friend had the sense not to try it. Dressed or not, Gail is always himself and he does not put on any sickening attitudes and affectations. (I found this to be true in general of tvs—they do not offend by the exaggerations that the homosexual queens utilize.)

So we sat and talked and that was when I realized that my mental sexual radar was not functioning. No matter what I saw, I *knew* there was no woman in that room. I felt the ease that men always have in exclusively masculine company.

What do tvs talk about? They talk about themselves, about their problems, about transvestism, and sometimes about such practical matters as involve the problems of dressing up.

We sounded each other out. But first Gail showed me around the new apartment.

Besides the main room and kitchenette, there were

two bedrooms. One was masculine, in furnishing and colors. This was where Gail slept when not dressing or otherwise. There was no hint of anything odd about that room. He could show it to non-tv guests with complete safety.

The other room was the tv room. It had been planned that way from the start. It was very feminine in style; there were twin beds with pinkish flowered covers, a dressing table, drapes, and a wall-length closet. The closet's three sliding doors had had special locks installed on them so they could be secure from the investigations of hired maids.

Visiting tvs from out of town would be welcome to stay with Gail. Local persons wanting a safe place to dress for a few hours could visit and dress there. Gail slid the closet doors open revealing his racks and racks of dresses and shoes and several jewel boxes overflowing with costume jewelry of every description.

It is always interesting to meet new people in the world of transvestism. There are no two exactly alike, and the exchange of confidences is a thing that cannot be duplicated, I am sure, in other groups. There is always a great warmth between new people; in a matter of minutes they are talking as if they were the oldest of friends. And they feel like the oldest of friends.

Yet there are realms where it is not considered politic to probe. One of these is the matter of real names and real addresses. Unless they are volunteered, it is not correct to ask. There is a mutual regard for each other's safety in this. Two people may talk about their most private feelings and yet neither know the real name, occupation, or home address of the other. They exchange

phone numbers or post office boxes and that is sufficient.

Rae and Karen, like Gail, had never had contact until about a year ago. This, I learned, is characteristic of the tv world. As an organized group, it is very new, derived from contacts made with Virginia's magazine or through Susanna's wide acquaintances or correspondence circles. Anyone who had been active among others for as much as two years was an old-timer.

Rae was a native New Yorker. He shared an apartment with two other men, neither of whom had any suspicion of his transvestism. He worked for the city, held an engineering degree, and was a sports car enthusiast.

I was curious how he could share an apartment and get away with it. He explained that he kept his feminine clothing in a locked bureau. He slept in satin nightgowns, kept his bedroom door locked, and managed to attend to his special laundering without anyone ever spotting it. He and Karen had been utilizing an abandoned house somewhere out on Long Island, to which Rae had access, in order to do their dressing.

They would drive out there, get into this house with its shaded windows and weed-overgrown grounds, unlock a closet where they had stored their wigs and dresses and just play girls for an evening. It wasn't much fun, but it is necessary for a transvestite to find some place to dress occasionally. If this release is not obtained, the result will be acute depression, increasing tension, and a marked deterioration of their work or studies.

I gather that Rae was not trespassing on this house—he was either a part owner or in some way a legitimate custodian. He and Karen were part of the circle that operated around Gail. I came to realize that I had been

honored by admittance to that circle. It was moderately exclusive. There were perhaps a dozen in that group.

The New York tv world at that time seemed to operate around three such nuclei. There was no formal club and there were no clearly defined lines—just groups of people who had contacts and knew where they could go to meet others. These three points of contact were Susanna's apartment uptown, Gail's apartment downtown, and a midtown place which was the home of someone called Vicky.

No one was confined to each specific contact. The groups intermingled and overlapped, yet the lines were there. I often heard of names known to Gail whom I never saw or met at Gail's—and who were never invited down there even though regarded as friends. This Vicky, for instance, was one such.

Gail, with his usual wry sense of humor, has been known to answer the telephone with the greeting, "Downtown Branch!" It took me aback on a couple of occasions.

Karen was of Irish birth, as his voice revealed. He had arrived in the States about a year before, after living and working in Canada for a period. He was an accountant, also at that time shared an apartment with other fellows who knew nothing of his eccentricity.

He was one of a large family in the Old Country, with five sisters, all older than himself. We never went into how he got his problem but I think it could almost be self-evident. Where a boy is isolated among a flock of elder sisters, he is both the baby of the family and has no one to pattern himself after except his siblings. Which is not to say that Karen is effeminate, because he is not.

But as we were talking, I happened to mention that I was a correspondent of Gilbert's. Karen's eyes lit up. "And how is Nancy these days?" he asked.

"Who?" I said.

"Nancy," he replied. "Gilbert. That's Nancy."

"But," I said, perplexed, "he told me he never had used a femme name."

Karen looked amazed. "But everybody knows he's Nancy. You can even find his picture in the magazine, sitting around in a mass of petticoats, with a blond wig."

Now it was my turn to be amazed. I explained that Gilbert had denied to me that he ever did any such thing, took pictures, used a name, all that.

Karen was amused. "I never heard that he ever denied it. He must have changed since I saw him, or maybe he's playing it cautious with you. Next time you write him give him my regards. Or, rather tell him that Alice from Canada sends him regards. I changed to Karen after I got to New York."

It seems that when Karen had arrived in Canada, he had gotten in correspondence with Gilbert through a newspaper up there that caters to such contacts. He had been invited to stop off at Gilbert's New England home on his way down to New York, and he had spent a weekend there.

Nancy, as Gilbert had referred to himself in correspondence, had had a ball, putting all sorts of frilly little girl clothes on Karen—who was a slight young man and could fit these specially tailored outsize garments of Gilbert's needlework. I gathered that Nancy had a well-stocked closet of all sorts of outfits, many very old-fashioned, had wigs, and also had two boy mannequins which

he used to dress up in girls' clothing.

"Nancy was in trouble when I last heard of him, and he cut off all correspondence," said Karen. "I see he's starting again."

"What sort of trouble?" I asked.

"Well, the post office got hold of some letters he had written to someone. I guess they fell into the wrong hands, and apparently these letters were pretty indiscreet. Anyway, the post office arrested him, stopped his mail, brought him to trial. He was fined $500, and I think it made a scandal in his town. Nancy had a very wide correspondence with lots of people and he was very good at it."

"I know," I said, realizing that my confidant Gilbert had been many things to many people. It was a shock, but it was also a good thing.

When next I wrote to Gilbert, I did not mention what I had heard, but mentioned that I had met "Alice from Canada" and sent regards. From that point on, Gilbert's correspondence, though prompt, was also short, terse, and evidenced a desire to pull away.

I was to learn as my familiarity with the tv world grew that Nancy operated a wide network within it, distinguished by an effort to keep one correspondent from contact with another. In that way, Nancy keeps all the strings in his hands and can play any role he chooses by mail. I have constantly encountered various of Nancy's webs in the most surprising places. And his tangled web is not the true transvestic one, but a sort of side world, a branch of transvestism which is combined with his particular halfway post of petticoat punishment, and whose members indulge in long fantasies of that nature.

On the other hand, Gilbert was no ogre, did not force himself on anyone, and could be one of the most generous of people to those who played his game.

But I let my correspondence lapse after that.

There is always something bizarre, unusual, interesting going on among tvs. They constitute one of the most amazing phenomena in America, hidden in the everyday world, and tiptoeing around and across the borderline of sex. Each contact is a new revelation in human experience—each is a story more startling than most published fiction.

Three weeks after this gathering in Gail's—and two more such gatherings in those weeks—I made an expedition to the Far West—and met the Big Blonde to end all big blondes.

Chapter Ten

Business called me to the Pacific Northwest. I would be traveling through a couple of states in that distant corner of America, and I wondered if there was anyone whom I could contact out there. It was a rare and precious opportunity. I recalled the magazine that told of Annette, and I recalled from a little personal ad that this Annette had been trying to contact other persons near a certain large city in that region. Annette interested me, and her pictures intrigued me. I was in the mood for adventure.

I wrote a letter to Annette, sent it to Virginia to forward. In a little while I went to my post office box and found a letter bearing a return business address in a city I did not recognize. It was from Annette. He wrote that I would be more than welcome, and gave me his address, real name, and phone number. If I could manage to visit, please do. A photo was inclosed, showing a smiling blonde beauty.

Well. If I had doubts, it would certainly help to calm them. I looked on the map; yes, I could manage the visit if I took a half-day off from my regular course, and made a short side flight.

It worked out. I found the day, I found the time, I bought my plane ticket on a local short-run airline, and I flew to the city in question. My plane came bouncing down at the neat little airport, and I walked down the gangway and over to the small terminal. Standing in the doorway, smiling widely, was a big, good-looking man, with a blond crewcut, keen blue eyes, wearing a torn work shirt and blue jeans. A little boy of two was clinging to his trousers.

I had sent him a photo of myself and he recognized me. We met, we shook hands, and we were friends. We went out, climbed into his station wagon, and set out for his home. The little boy, his son, sat happily between us.

Imagine a land that is hot and barren and desert; a land where trees are few and far between and where mountains and hills exist only in the far horizons, and where a wide river flows between two banks of this desert country, with a dusty industrial city clinging to one side of it under the unfriendly sun.

Imagine then that on the outskirts of this town there suddenly rises one single hill, a hill that looms above the city and dominates it. Imagine that on the wide top of this solitary hill, there is a grove of trees, the only such orchard to be seen for miles around. Within this grove of trees there is a ranch-type, sprawling house, surrounded by lawns, concealed from view by the encircling green arbors.

This was Annette's house, as perfect a home for a cross-dresser as can be imagined. Complete privacy, open air, beauty against the drabness and sereneness of the land. On the way there, Annette talked a bit about himself, his work. He owned his own business and it was one that required mechanical ingenuity and hard work. And he was no weakling.

This was a strong, healthy young man, about thirty years of age, well-muscled, and very much a he-man. We parked the car, went inside.

He lived with his wife, his mother, and his two children—the son I had met and a daughter of three and a half. The wife was a smiling brunette with a Southern accent, the mother a kindly lady. I was greeted as a friend. Annette said did I mind waiting. He would change. As a rule he said it took him four hours to dress, for he made a ritual out of it. It was a serious matter to him, that usually started with a long hot bath, then went on to various preparations, make-up, and so forth.

This time he'd try to cut it short. Instead of four hours, he'd try to make it in two. There wasn't much I could do about that, so we parted temporarily. I made myself comfortable, read magazines, chatted with the family, wandered about the lawns, killed time. I was nervous, of course, as I always was in those days—and this sort of experience is never easy. The sensation that I was about to meet a new personality, to experience the odd sensation of meeting someone who was crossing the border between the sexes, to meet a woman who was actually a man, this is not something calculated to put anyone at ease—even the most experienced, I can state with confidence, never quite get over that.

So I killed time. The sun was beginning to set and the shadows to lengthen when the porch door creaked and the Big Blonde stepped out. That's the only way I can describe Annette. She was the Big Blonde of fiction and fantasy, the bouncy big beauty that you might encounter in movies and dance halls.

Annette was six foot two, but somehow this didn't detract from his amazing femininity. His skin was clear and soft, his blue eyes sparkled, his blonde hair bounced, his shape was fabulous, and when Annette spoke, it was the right voice for such a big girl, a little husky, soft yet not masculine.

I shall say here that my impressions then have stood the test of time. I have met innumerable transvestite impersonations, including some of the best, but there is none like Annette. This is one who gets away with it because you simply would like to believe in this Big Blonde. She'd be fun to know, and Annette is fun to know. Annette is convincing, inoffensive, and about as perfect as you can get in a superficial sex switch.

And at the same time Annette is a man. By that I mean, there is no pretense about passing as a woman. There is no dual personality nonsense. This is the same person you met before. You are at ease at once.

We sat in lawn chairs relaxed and we talked about ourselves. Later on when it got dark, Annette broiled steaks on an outdoor grill, and we all ate together—Annette, his wife, his two children, his mother, and a couple of friends of the family. For Annette does not hide his impersonation. Nobody dislikes this Big Blonde. You couldn't.

Of course, we talked about Annette and his life. It

hadn't always been easy. His course had been troubled, guilt-ridden, rocky, like all the rest. His first interest had been in high-heeled shoes, when he was a small boy. As he had grown up, he had indulged in secret, off and on. He had been called into the service, had been in the Marines, had risen to top sergeant—a tough soldier—had been offered a commission but turned it down. He had originally located in another city in that state, worked as general manager for another owner. He had married; he had made himself a community leader; he had been a member of the city government, young as he was.

And he had confided in his wife. At first he told her he liked to wear high heels and she let him. But he went farther and farther and finally she recognized his need occasionally to dress completely the part. Not every night, not too often, but every now and then he needed to let off steam. When he tried to stop the habit, it brought on periods of deep depression, and his wife saw that it was an essential part of his character. So she allowed him to dress.

But there seemed a certain futility in dressing so carefully that it would take four hours—and then just sitting around the house. They had friends, good friends, surely they could let them in on it. And this they did. When dressed, they would drive over to visit friends, sit, play cards, enjoy themselves. Nobody seemed to mind. Considering the Big Blonde, that was understandable. Annette was a fun person.

So gradually Annette's little hobby became known around town, with nobody resenting it. He told me he'd even passed photos of his femme personality around to

members of the city officialdom just for laughs.

He'd had his problems. He wanted to go into business for himself and, when the time for the decision came, it was hard to make. "I dressed as Annette every day for a month and just sat around the house brooding," he told me. To me, this was an escape from making decisions. I didn't say this to him, but he probably knew; because he finally made his decision, quit his old job, and set up for himself.

Hard work crowned him with success. And Annette continued to be his release from tension, from trouble, from the load of taking care of his family.

They had friends who knew Annette as well as they knew the man. They went out together as man and wife or Annette and girl friend. But Annette never passed himself off as a woman. Whenever introduced to strangers, he always informed them of his real sex. The trouble was they often refused to believe it. You really liked to believe in the big bouncy blonde. Annette was very authentic.

Once he had trouble. They had been at a large party and an ardent young man had been making a determined play for Annette. Everything the Big Blonde said about being a man was taken simply as a joke. It was a gag the girl was pulling just to hold him off. The young man mooned around, getting frustrated and insistent. Then someone came along, and somehow managed to verify Annette's assertion. There was a moment of stunned shock as the cold fact finally penetrated the ardent one. Then fury, and the young man charged across, and snatched Annette's wig off.

That tore it. Annette had not been a Marine sergeant

for nothing. That young man found that his blonde amour packed a wallop as solid as any professional boxer.

Annette had told his mother only a year before, on the advice of his psychiatrist. Like many tvs he had tried to find a cure, but psychiatry has no cure for something which is as pleasant to the victim as cross-dressing and actually is harmless to society. The advice had been to live with it, to render it guiltless, to confess it to his loved ones.

He wrote his mother a letter about it. At first she was incredulous, then confused, finally very upset. She went to her library, read all she could about the mysterious subject of transvestism, and, not satisfied, she went to a psychologist herself, talked it over with him. Finally she visited her son, saw him dressed, and talked it over some more.

I found her tranquil, but I think still somewhat uneasy. She couldn't really understand it, but she could not deny his manhood, his unquestioned status as father, breadwinner, and good soldier. I spent time talking with her, and she told me of her worries about it. I did my best to reassure her that she had nothing to be ashamed of in her son. And I believe that.

Annette had two children, both of whom saw him dressed. What about that? I asked. This matter of children is a very tender point with transvestites. Almost all agree that it is not for children to see or to know about. Nobody wanted their sons afflicted with their curse. Nobody wanted their daughters confused on the subject of sex. A daddy who could become a woman was hardly anything to confront a growing child with.

Annette admitted it was a problem he had not solved.

It was his own home, and he needed to be master of his own home, and dressing was a necessary part of his mental make-up. At three, his oldest was not yet likely to be influenced. But when she was six or seven, she would be able to remember and put two and two together. Annette did not know the answer. Neither did Annette's wife, who I suspect was a bit worried about it. They would cross the bridge when they came to it.

Right now, it was something the little girl took in her stride. When she saw daddy was going to retire to the bathroom to begin his ritual, she had been known to ask, "Is Miss Annette going to visit us tonight?" She liked "Miss Annette," and there was no problem . . . yet.

The night drew on, and it was nearly time for my plane. I had to be elsewhere in a few hours. Annette asked whether I couldn't stay the night, but it was not possible. Reluctantly I got ready to leave. I said goodbye to the wife, farewell to the mother. Suddenly, the older lady surprised me, grabbed me, kissed me. I was startled, though I realized afterwards that perhaps I had helped in my small way to allay her fears of this thing.

Annette and his little girl drove me to the airport. It was the first time I had ever been out in public with a dressed tv. The Big Blonde tooled the station wagon expertly into town and across to the air terminal. His little daughter sat between us and we rode through the night, talking lightly, I a little bemused with the wonder of it.

We reached the airport, I got out. Annette said, "Stay a few minutes more, just five more minutes." My plane

was in, I couldn't wait. The little girl waved to me, called, "Come back, come back."

I waved back. "Some time, some day," I called, glanced once more at the smiling Big Blonde, and ran to catch my plane.

Chapter Eleven

My progress had been slow but steady. Gail's apartment remained my only point of contact with the New York world of tvs, but it was a good center for one who was still little more than an observer. Gail had once had a wide social life in many strata, but during the past year he had slipped deeper and deeper into the secret circles of this sexual borderland until he had reached the stage where he dressed virtually every night, where there was usually a visitor or two at all times that he was home, and where his only activities were in the company of transvestites.

He was an intelligent and highly sensitive man and he knew what was happening to him. His guilt was rarely very deeply hidden and, given any opportunity, he would admit his fears of what was consuming him. He was working, yet he admitted that the thought of dressing intruded on his working hours and he could hardly wait until he got home to begin his transformation. He knew it was bad, he admitted that he was head-

ing into a pointless morass; for there wasn't any real direction to go beyond what he was doing. The Christine Jorgenson type of sex-transformation operation is not the desire of tvs—there is a tiny fraction that moves toward that end but one must question whether they were truly of the faction or were simply finding an out for suppressed homosexuality. Gail certainly did not consider it for an instant.

So Gail's place was an active center and I would drop in once a week on an afternoon or evening, sit and chat for a couple hours, meet new people, get news of the set, exchange thoughts on my own problems and those of others. No one asked me to dress; they took it for granted that I did in my own time and at my own discretion. Had I wished, I could have brought a valise over and dressed at Gail's—many who could not dress at their own homes did that for an evening.

Gail's life was not confined to his apartment. Sometimes he and others visited Susanna, or went to one of the several night clubs that catered to impersonators, or paid visits to other tvs who were able to entertain visitors.

One impression we all got was that the world of transvestites was growing by leaps and bounds. New people were making themselves known regularly; they were, in Gail's words, "popping out of the woodwork everywhere."

It made you think. How large was this world of transvestism? How many American men indulged in cross-dressing? Was this a growing phenomenon, a latent one merely being encouraged by the existence of a magazine and a growing circle of people who knew other people

(itself a new thing in this field), or was there really such a wide world of interest that nobody realized how many there were until a little stir was made in the surface of society?

I think the stresses of our society, hanging as it has been since 1945 on the brink of some sort of atomic abyss, are creating more and more tensions among mankind. I believe that the need to escape from reality is growing, that such terrible tensions require safety valves, and that one of the most successful escape mechanisms is total disguise. Dress like a woman, pretend to be a woman, change your name—and you have for a few minutes or a few hours expunged your guilt of being part of a society rotten to the core and heading for disaster.

The tensions of modern days are fearful. I have taken no polls, but I would venture a confident guess that there has been a steady rise in gambling, in drinking, in infidelity, in dishonesty, in sadism, in cheating, and in plain inhumanity, and that this rise has gone on year after year. The decline in morality of the world's leaders is shocking to anyone who can make comparisons with other epochs, and we live in a society where so-called defense industry, almost maniacal with the piling up of overkill techniques, virtually dominates our economy.

Is it therefore any wonder that more and more men are finding relief by fleeing from their identity and the guilt of their war-crazy sex? I say this in full recognition of the fact that women are no idealists, that as a sex they can be as bigoted and small-minded and bloodthirsty as men—but the idealization of woman that is the fantasy of the male is always free of that sort of truth.

Transvestites do not concern themselves with women as they are, only with women as they would like them to be. Two different things, but the latter is an escape into at least the imitation of guiltless purity.

In my own case there was certainly such a factor at work. I could detect it in others. Transvestism in the flesh was escape from reality, a disguise of guilt in the raiment of beauty and luxury, a closing of the eyes to the evil that surrounds us on all sides. To be a man is to carry a heavy burden of responsibility, not only for wife and family, for business and money-earning, but also for the errors and terrors of the world. To pose as a woman is to set aside that responsibility for a brief moment, to find some relief from tension.

That is one of the reasons behind transvestism, one not connected with the subjects dwelt on in psychology texts and case histories of the emotionally disturbed. I believe that transvestism is a growing American phenomenon, that it is more widespread than any imagine, and that it will become more so.

There were always new people turning up and there were never two with the same history. I was being inundated with human life drama, with human stories never chronicled, with people whose secret lives were stranger than fiction and yet flesh-and-blood and anguish.

Consider Rae. No coward he, no wishy-washy he, but he had his flaws. He had served with honor in the Korean war. He enjoyed dangerous sports: Scuba diving, skiing, sports car driving. He had girl friends and he had had a disastrous romance, which the girl broke off after Rae had told her of his cross-dressing. But what of his youth, what was his secret?

He once denied to me that he was among those who hated his father. His father, who was dead, seemed to occupy a favorable place in his conscious recollections. Yet, on another occasion, he casually mentioned that he had often tried to run away from home as a child, that his father had beaten him with a strap, that he had been chained to a table in the living room, while his two sisters had never been so treated. Did he still love his father? Yes—he had never allowed his mind to put two and two together. But it didn't require a professional student of psychology to put a finger on one basis for his compulsive cross-dressing.

You could figure him, but there were others who presented only fragments of history, or none at all, and you wondered at the variety.

There was a brilliant undergraduate of one of the Ivy League colleges, called Sandra by the group. Sandra claimed to have been cured—he hadn't dressed in a year, but he couldn't keep away from the company of tvs when in town. Is that cure? Or is that passing the guilt to scapegoats? Sandra was the second tallest transvestite in the group—he was six and a half feet tall. There was another in the Midwest who was six feet eight. I never saw Sandra dressed, but I did see photos, and he looked rather good. He explained to me once that he used to buy his clothes at "Tall Girls" departments of big stores, and would simply give the salesgirls a written list of what he wanted. They never asked questions, and he never experienced embarrassment or difficulty.

The question of buying clothes always troubles tvs in their early stages. They are extremely self-conscious in women's wear shops or counters, but they soon learn

that this is all in the mind. Salesgirls simply cannot conceive of the possibility that the man before her is buying for himself. It is remote from their minds. Again, being a salesgirl is a monotonous, tiresome, and mechanical routine that soon puts them into a state where they do not particularly think, they just act.

After a few experiments, most men gain confidence and go anywhere and buy anything. Innumerable men buy women's clothing for their wives or loved ones and they do so without guilt. For the tv, guilt makes the difference and he is always acutely self-conscious in such stores. If you consider that the transvestite has this distinction—that for him women's wear arouses erotic thoughts—this acute discomfort is understandable.

I might note here that I myself was about eighteen years old before it began to dawn on me that lingerie was not erotic to other men, that it meant little in the way of sexual excitement. I had taken it for granted, and it came as a sort of shock to find that I was unique in my viewpoint.

My wife had been coming along in her understanding of transvestism with remarkable insight. Our love life had never been warmer, never been closer, and I believe this did a lot to assuage her fears that she might somehow be losing me. Actually the breaking down of the last secret between us had the effect of sealing our marriage more tightly than ever before. For this reason, she went along with me as I gradually accumulated the accouterments for a complete impersonation—which was yet to come.

I had told her of the people I had met and she was

becoming curious. Rae, Sandra, Karen, Gail, and Jessica, and Buff.

Jessica was a tall Latin American, scion of a wealthy family in South America. He was living in New York, working in advertising (he was a moving force behind one campaign that caught the attention of everyone in the U.S.A.), while his wife and child were living in England. He was in his late twenties, fairly handsome as a man, and well educated.

Jessica was among those who traveled around the city dressed. He made a striking brunette beauty, with a slim, svelte figure, and a fine wardrobe. He owned a little Austin-Healey sports car and as a girl drove about town catching the eyes of men on the sidewalks and harvesting a crop of wolf whistles.

He once explained to me that he lived in an exclusive apartment house on Manhattan's East Side. The car was in the basement garage. He had arranged with the garagemen for his "sister" to use the car occasionally. Unfortunately, the "sister could not speak English." So, when he wanted to go out, he dressed in his apartment, went down in the service elevator to the basement, tripped over to the red sportster, smiled sweetly at garagemen, saying nothing, and drove out, while they tipped their hats.

Jessica loved to pose for pictures, was a positively frenzied Narcissist, and would strike poses every time he spotted himself in a mirror. It was through him that I met Siobhan.

I had some prints of pictures I had taken of Jessica and he was anxious to see them. So we made a lunch date

during a workday and I met him. He had another contact and so Siobhan joined us.

I had heard of this one but had not met him, as he did not orbit in the Downtown Branch. Siobhan was possibly one of the most successful in the city at getting away with public appearances. A fairly heavy young man in his thirties, he made himself into the exact facsimile of the stylish stout. Nobody would have suspected a male identity in a hundred years, and he would promenade in dress along Fifth Avenue, shop for hours in the big department stores, try on dresses, and even hold credit plates in his femme name.

And with all that, Siobhan was a strong-willed man, editor of a scientific trade journal, holder of a Master's Degree, and on his way toward winning a Ph.D.

The one that interested many was the one called Buff. I had seen pictures of this one long before I met him. He was an engineer and a semiprofessional photographer. He was skilled in his own impersonation and the pictures he had taken of himself were really beautiful. He was one of the few tvs to achieve the appearance of a young and beautiful girl.

My first impression of Buff when I finally met him was that here was a man even more nervous than I—a man jumpy and ill at ease, and very sensitive. He was a short man, with good clear features, and it was clear from talking with him that he had put an enormous amount of thought and skill into his transvestism. He was among the few to whom the "woman within" was a real thing; and this strange girl he knew as Buff could and would dominate his being at times.

Buff had a wife who went along with him, who helped

him dress, and aided his work. He also had a mother who did not know of his dressing, but who may possibly have suspected it. Buff was getting ready to break the news to her. It was something to think about.

On the Fourth of July, I crossed another invisible line. My wife agreed to accompany me to Gail's.

Chapter Twelve

We had tickets to a show on the evening of Independence Day. The children were away for the summer, and we were free to move about without family encumbrances. We decided to drop in at Gail's place for a couple of hours in the afternoon before proceeding uptown to dinner and theatre. I phoned Gail, warned him in advance, and we drove into town.

Parking nearby, we went into the small lobby of the house, rang the buzzer. I was nervous, and my wife was more so. What would we encounter this time? In a manner of speaking, we hit the jackpot.

Gail opened the door, dressed to the heels, wearing a white and blue cocktail dress, hair beautifully set, and welcomed us in. I thought to myself, if there is anything about this that my wife secretly still thinks repugnant, she'll have every opportunity . . . for he was in top form.

There were two others present. One was Rae. Up to that moment, though I had met Rae several times, I had

never seen him in impersonation. Now he was, and he was breathtaking. He was tall—for a girl—in a flowing gown, and looked like a striking model or show girl. He was seated at the little table enameling his nails, and he looked up and smiled a bit oddly when introduced.

Rae, I knew, had been selected as a cover girl for Virginia's magazine on an issue to come, and now I could see why. He would photograph like a dream. I wondered though why he seemed so unlike himself; something was awry.

There was a third person in the room. This apparent young girl was curled up on the settee underneath the wall-high mirror and watching us with a half-smile. I had never seen this one before. As we came in, the shapely legs uncurled, and the girl came to her feet and moved to greet us. She was very feminine, dressed in an off-white cocktail dress with a bouffant skirt, but as she stood it was clear that she was perhaps a little taller than the average girl. That it was not a she but a he, I was sure, but there was something which caught my eye at once.

I recall as a boy watching my sisters put on make-up, and I recalled that in those days eyeshadow was generally a dab of blue in the outer corner of the space between eyelid and eyebrow. A sort of finger dab of color. This technique is never to be seen today, in America it has been replaced by the blue eyelid coloring and perhaps a faint powdering of the under-the-brow area.

But this new one was using the finger dab coloration that American girls had abandoned twenty years before. Where then did he come from?

The answer came with the introduction. It was Fiona from New Zealand. Fiona had just arrived in New York.

My wife and I seated ourselves. The conversation would have been strained, but Fiona made the difference. Fiona had that mystical something called charm, and with the novelty of the situation, his voyage, and his interest in things American, we soon had a relaxed and easy conversation going.

While we talked I watched Rae and I noticed that his hands were trembling. I realized then that, war record or not, the presence of an r.g. while he was in dress had a nerve-racking influence on him. The term r.g. is another bit of specialized terminology. It stands for real girl. (Recently there has been an effort to substitute g.g., meaning genetic girl, but this sounds too much like the race track tout's geegee to be popular.)

Fiona had just made a twenty-eight-day voyage by ship from the South Pacific. He was passing through New York, on his way to Canada, where he was taking post-graduate studies in a Canadian university in order to qualify for a special degree in his chosen profession.

Fiona had been dressing for ten years, ever since he was fifteen, and doing it in secret with increasing skill. He had first been introduced to girl's clothes at the age of four, through a whim of his mother's, but it had not been stressed and did not recur until he experimented with a pair of his sister's silver slippers.

For most of his life he had assumed that he was alone in the world, that his desire was peculiar to himself, until finally he ran across references to others like himself in Havelock Ellis. But as far as he knew he was still unique in New Zealand. He had never met another, but

had somehow heard of the magazine, had managed to obtain it, and had been once written up in it.

The roots of his problem? He could not say, except that his father was absent on business perhaps too much during his growing period and he had leaned too heavily on his mother and sisters. Living in his own apartment since college graduation, he had become expert in the art of self-photography and would pose behind locked doors for all sorts of glamorous photos. He had occasionally gone out dressed for long solitary drives through the countryside.

But Fiona had definite opinions on his ability to resist transvestism, too. He informed us that he was engaged to be married, that when his degree was earned, he would marry and that he would cease his dressing, forever if necessary, but for years in any case.

We thought this unlikely, but he clearly had a will of his own and, who knows, he might do it.

His fiancée, oddly enough, had actually seen him dressed. The occasion had been a "revue" for the college show, and he had been one of the dancers chosen. He had put on a good show, and his fiancée knew he had enjoyed it, but she did not suspect how compulsive and deeply entrenched the role really was in his whole personality.

My wife entered the conversation, a bit quick in speech—which was a giveaway of her nerves—but eventually we all settled down and began to chat rather calmly. Even Rae leveled off, and by and by Gail was engaging in his usual badinage. Fiona and I were rapidly probing each other, and suddenly I realized that, New Zealand or not, we had at least one mutual friend in

common. Someone I had known in New York in my normal life had emigrated to New Zealand in fear of the atomic future. And somehow this person, down there, had become a friend of Fiona—under his male name and personality, needless to say.

This was startling to me, evidence of the essential smallness of the world, or else of the fact that transvestism is so widespread that even in a small straight social circle, it is possible for two to impinge on each other.

Before we left, we heard another of those anecdotes that all tvs can tell. On as long a voyage as Fiona's, there was always a masquerade ball, and there had been one. As you might surmise, Fiona decided to attend as a chorus girl, having the makings with his luggage. He was at his best, he says, and had a good time at the affair, but when it came time for the prizes he was left out. There had been several other men there who had dressed as women, none very successfully, and one of these had taken a prize.

Fiona shrugged off his disappointment. Several days later, while enjoying a cocktail with a man who had been one of the judges at the ball—and during it had actually danced with Fiona the chorine—this man suddenly stared hard and gasped. "Why," he said, "you—you were the chorus girl!"

Fiona nodded, not realizing until then that the man hadn't known. "But," said the other, "if we had even suspected you were not a girl, we'd have given you the First Prize! But it never dawned on us. We didn't know you were in costume!"

To a tv, that remark alone was worth a prize.

When it came time to leave, I mentioned that we

would be driving to Canada in three weeks on vacation. Fiona at once took me aside and gave me a note bearing his true name and the address at which he would be staying. "Please look me up. My roommate is a tv also, and I'm sure we'd be glad to have you visit."

What were my wife's views? As we drove uptown, we discussed them. My hunch was right, she shared my feelings. She said that she sensed in each of them something of the qualities she knew in me—qualities which she characterized as a certain sensitivity, a gentleness, a lack of the kind of boorish vulgarity which is found among too many men. They were not effeminate, even so. They could not fool her, dress or not, and yet they did not offend her.

This first impression has remained my wife's impression of the tvs she has subsequently met. She likes them, but she likes them as men, and her oft-repeated comment to them is that they usually look and act better as men than as women.

This is another of those curiosities of the tv world. Men over thirty tend to look younger when dressed and wigged. Such as Gail look as much as ten years younger. Young men may look the same age either way. But there are a handful, usually in their twenties, who unexpectedly look older when dressed.

I imagine everyone has speculated idly on what he would have looked like had he been born of the opposite sex. I can tell you . . . and you'd be surprised. You can't predict in advance. The ugly can look fair. The plain can look glamorous. The handsome can look beautiful. And just as easily the handsome can look plain, and the plain,

often just plainer. It's all a matter of make-up, technique, and taste. Every hairdresser and cosmetician knows this, but most tvs have to learn the hard way, and some never learn.

With the children away for the summer, there was an opportunity for me to advance my fantasies of cross-dressing, and now, with my wife's more open-hearted assistance, I worked at it. We bought a cheap wig for experimental purposes, and spent some time working at the problem of make-up. I was not an easy case, for at my age nobody is likely to be a raving beauty, and especially not a man likely to have afternoon shadow and weathered skin.

We went to Canada on vacation. Eventually we arrived at the university town where Fiona was located. We phoned that evening. We followed instructions, drove over to the apartment house on a wide tree-shaded street, rang the bell. The buzzer unlocked the door, and we went up the stairs.

The door of the apartment was ajar and we followed instructions and let ourselves in. We came into the main room of the apartment and Fiona was there to greet us. Once again appearing as a charming young lady, he was genuinely glad to see us.

Fiona was wearing skirt and blouse, waist pulled in by a wide belt, and presenting a very shapely figure. The white silky blouse was very low cut and we could see a shockingly deep cleft where the bosom apparently swelled. I had seen this in Virginia, but this witchcraft was even more expert.

Don't ask me how he did it. I never did understand,

but I have seen my friend from Down Under bare-chested at other times and he's as flat-chested as any athletic healthy young male could be.

Where was his roommate? Irene was dressing, and would be out shortly. We looked around. It was a typical bachelor apartment, nothing feminine anywhere, quite as untidy as one would expect of two men sharing quarters. We talked, and then Irene joined us.

Irene was—all woman, I will have to say. A brunette with slightly Oriental countenance, very feminine voice, and the very feminine mannerisms that would be correct in the lady we were looking at. He wore a deep rose dress, and acted the hostess.

But Irene was also all-male we discovered as soon as we got into a controversy. Opinionated, highly intelligent, and masculine in approach to the world. As the evening progressed, our conversation became that of good friends, controversial, with the respect of intelligent men for each other. Irene, it seemed, was an engineer with an aircraft company in that city. Irene was English, with a touch of Oriental, just enough to supply a high-pitched voice and an exotic appearance.

We took photos, and we looked at photos. Both had scrapbooks of poses and it would be impossible to say which was the more expert. Yet it was all in good fun, and—yes, I will say it—in good taste too.

I have dwelled on these two at length because, as we came to know them, the two of them separately and individually have become numbered among the people we regard as friends for a lifetime. Yet it was about three months before we ever saw either of them as the men they really were 98 per cent of the time!

The three months represented a significant target date for me. Back in June I had begun to entertain the thought, and it had been crystallizing as a definite goal, that Hallowe'en was the time for me to make an appearance among others at what might well be a momentous event in the history of transvestism.

On the week-end of Hallowe'en in 1961, there had been a party at the resort in upstate New York. It had been written up briefly in the magazine, for Virginia and another Los Angeles friend known as Evelyn had come across the country to attend it. There had been sixteen persons there, if my memory is correct, and in that time and that year it had been a lot of tvs to be dressed at the same time. (Once again, I repeat that tvs do not regard the mass appearances of men in female garb at "drag" balls or other such homosexual spectacles as having anything to do with them or their world. The two types of cross-dressers are and remain at opposite poles. They have no use for each other and they do not understand each other.)

I had seen some photos of this gathering, and already knew many of those who had been there. This affair was to be repeated in 1962 on Hallowe'en weekend. This time it promised to be a really big gathering.

I had never been to the resort and I had decided that I was never going to bother to go—until that weekend. To attend, I would be expected to dress all the way; for that is the least to be expected of any participants. But that affair might well be worth the effort; it was very likely to be unique.

It was. But before I go into how I got there and what happened, it is time to digress for one more personality

study. Back in May, I had started several correspondences with out-of-town people. One was with Val of Kansas. My correspondence with Val is before me on a shelf as I write this now. It is about eight inches high, and must contain over half a million words. It constitutes an exhaustive analysis of ourselves.

Chapter Thirteen

I had originally begun correspondence with Val under the impression that he was a married man who was a professional writer of some sort, with children. All these impressions had come from an article by him in an early issue of Virginia's magazine. They turned out to be fictitious, but the reality was no less interesting.

Val was a native of a town in Kansas of about twelve thousand population. He was in his early thirties and unmarried, and certainly not a father. But he was a writer, even if at that time he had not seen much success in gaining print. For him writing was a form of medicine . . . he called it saturation therapy.

Val wrote sixteen hours a day, seven days a week! He did this while managing a small store—with consequent neglect of the store. But he had to write. It was either pound the typewriter or dress. But he was determined to cure his compulsive cross-dressing by any means he could find. He had settled upon something that would

occupy his mind one hundred per cent of his waking hours. That something was pounding a typewriter, and pound it he did.

He wanted to correspond and so did I. I wanted to exchange my ideas on this obscure subject and find a safe shoulder to cry on—for he knew me only as a pen name from a post office box and I was free to write from the heart—as was he.

So we exchanged letters and after a few preliminaries we began to sense each other's sincerity and desperate desire to write this thing out, to plumb it, to engage if you will in amateur mutual analysis. Val opened up wide and voluble. Starved for intelligent discussion in a small town lacking any noticeable intellectual group, he had a thousand ideas he wanted to project and I was his target . . . willingly, I must add, for I too wanted to try out some of my own thoughts.

I have letters from Val that cover as many as thirty-six pages, to which he thoughtfully added a table of contents, after carefully classifying and indexing the subjects. Val had ideas on everything, but mostly he had ideas about the philosophy and psychology of transvestism.

He had put so much thought on this one topic that he was able to relate it to almost the whole body of human thought. You might suppose that a seemingly simple habit such as wanting to wear the clothes of the opposite sex would hardly justify such mental effort, but Val showed me there was nothing really simple about it and that it could be related to all phases of human culture and activity.

He pointed out connections and reflections of transvestic conduct upon poetry and politics, upon morality and education, upon literature and art, upon war and peace, and upon the rise of civilization. And indeed so deep-rooted is the subject in the ancient past of humanity, in the actions of primitive tribes, and the conduct of modern society, marketing, education, and so forth that he could hold forth most intelligently.

Val did not regard himself as a transvestite, although his personal history revealed it through and through. It was part of his "therapy" to deny this, to insist that he was merely a "compulsive" personality and that whatever he did showed this compulsive pattern. When he had given way to dressing, he did it exhaustively, and when he broke from it, he did that equally thoroughly.

Some of the problems of the small town tv were brought to my attention. As you might expect, it is far more difficult for a man to cater to such desires in a community where almost everybody knows everybody else, where he has been known since infancy, and where even the purchase of a single item of feminine clothing would be noted. In such towns, tvs keep themselves well concealed, and dress only under conditions of caution and hard-to-find isolation.

I have seen case histories of farmer tvs who had to dress briefly out in the woods or out on the far forty at night. The practice among them seems to favor taking the car or truck miles into uninhabited country and dressing out in the open. Val apparently had done things like this in his younger days, but he had—with his talent for exhaustive research—mastered the problem to his own satisfaction in a more amazing manner.

During the year and a half that he had "compulsively"

engaged in "saturation dressing" (again in the belief that by such saturation dressing he could kill the habit), he had done so in the heart of town, taking an apartment with a separate entrance, and had managed to live twelve hours out of every twenty-four as a girl.

He says he was so successful at this that he was never spotted. He had contrived so excellent a role that he was able to meet and talk with people who knew him as a man and not be recognized. He would shop in stores and supermarkets, travel freely, and once had met and talked briefly with his own mother without being "read."

How bizarre a world is that of the transvestite! Yet, how common. There is no town in America that does not have such bizarre goings-on, yet no one exchanges notes, no one compares statistics (except other tvs, of course).

Val was the son of a farmer—one of several children, but the only boy among them. His father's influence was almost never felt, for his father was a hard-working man and the children were raised by the mother. Herein surely lay the roots of Val's trouble.

He recalls his first point of unusual interest lay in the fact that he and his sisters, at the age of six, wore the same shoes. Whatever this may have meant, his first compulsive cross-dressing desire was fixed upon girls' shoes. Everything else grew from that fixation.

He tried to combat his secret clothing fantasies. Not wishing to be taken for a sissy, not inclined toward homosexuality, he strove to show his manliness in every way open to him, engaging in the roughest sports, building up his muscles, making himself a champion athlete in his school. Still, the desire grew and grew and by the

time he was sixteen he had cross-dressed completely in secret.

Still fighting the desire, he did not wait to be drafted but volunteered for the Armed Forces. He found the desire did not go away even then and, after he had served his hitch, he returned to civilian life knowing himself as being what the psychology books he had hunted down in service libraries described as a transvestite.

Deciding that if he couldn't lick it he could at least compromise with it, he found a job in a ladies' shoe store in the supposition that by working in that field he would get enough of it to destroy his fantasies ("saturation therapy" again). Far from losing his desires, two years in that business only sharpened and clarified his fixation. He reached a point where he had evolved an exact image of the perfect female and when a lady customer departed from that image (as almost all did in one way or another), he found himself becoming irritated. When he reached a point where if he had to sell a lady a shoe larger than his ideal image it upset him for the day, he decided that the shoe business was not for him.

He found a new line of work, running a small one-man store, and this proved far more beneficial. He prospered, began to build up a nice little capital, and then established his own apartment in town and began his experiment in saturation dressing.

He had studied what he could of the art of female impersonation, both by observation, and from what shreds of information could be gained from theatrical magazines

and theatrical costuming. Then he ran across an ad in *Variety* for a mail-order course in female impersonation. It would run into hundreds of dollars, but by this time Val had the cash and the interest and he enrolled.

The course was written and taught by an Edith Fallon Ferguson from an address in California. It was, according to Val, astoundingly detailed, exacting, and intensive. It came in a series of mimeographed lessons, and numbered perhaps a hundred such essays. From this course, Val learned how to use make-up, how to wear clothes, how to walk, how to talk, how to think as a woman, how to just about *be* a woman.

I have not been able to get much information about this Edith Ferguson, except to learn that he (?) was apparently a professional female impersonator, that the course was written after retirement, that Ferguson passed away four or five years ago. Val no longer has copies of the course and I have never seen one of these works.

In his compulsive way, Val mastered the course and was thus able to get away with his attempt to saturate himself with cross-dressing. During all this time, he had never had any contact with another transvestite, nor had he even seen a female impersonator on stage. Available to him had been only the writings of Havelock Ellis and other authorities, occasional articles in such magazines as *Sexology*, and such booklets touching upon the subject as were sometimes available from Haldeman-Julius and other popularizers of medical and scientific knowledge.

In the world of organized tvs today, almost everyone acknowledges a debt to Virginia's magazine as his original source of contact. Val, however, can make a different boast—Virginia contacted him. Evidently in the process

of locating potential subscribers to his project for launching this magazine, Virginia had purchased Ferguson's list of students, which included Val in Kansas.

So Val became a charter reader of the magazine and one of Virginia's longest correspondents. Being of a very individualistic turn of mind, Val has never agreed with Virginia's philosophy and the two have been disputing points for four years now, while remaining correspondence friends. This interchange takes an unusual form—Virginia finds time to answer Val's long letters only by talking into a tape recorder while driving to his place of work in the morning.

I heard part of one of these tapes played back for me over a long-distance telephone and it was a fantastic experience. In the background could be heard all the noises, honkings, gear-shifting, and engine-racing of heavy Los Angeles freeway traffic, while Virginia's dry and often pedantic voice would be answering Val's comment, making precise points of distinction on the philosophy of transvestism, and every now and then, pausing to cuss out some passing driver in a most unfeminine manner!

For a year and a half, Val continued to play a dual role in town. Then he abruptly decided it had not worked, quit completely, and started to write. When he felt the urge to dress, he would write. When he thought about clothes, he would write. He set out to write about anything that could conceivably be sold to magazines. He ended by writing about transvestism. Instead of doing it, he was thinking it and writing about it.

He wrote heaven knows how many articles. He wrote two full-length books to my knowledge. He wrote plays,

radio scripts, poetry, and essays. But he wouldn't give in. This was a new form of saturation therapy and he worked at it with incredible energy.

He was in that stage when our letters first crossed. We did each other a world of good.

When I contacted him he was showing signs of desperation—there was a certain element of hysteria showing through—he had found correspondents among tvs but none were able to keep up with his long letters and his endless flow of ideas. By good fortune, I was equally wrought up on the subject and anxious . . . and so our correspondence helped us both.

I will not quote from him, for he has the right to speak for himself and someday will do so in print. Some of his work has already sold and more will sell. I will close this account of him however by saying that his saturation therapy in writing also did not do the trick. He eventually began to cross-dress, though in a limited way and avoiding public appearances. I had advised him to learn moderation and this is a hard thing for him, but I believe he is gradually succeeding. What he proved to me is that you cannot cure transvestism without getting at the roots—and saturation therapies do no more than prolong evasion of the problem.

Val was the first to tell me of a new attempt at curing transvestism by a system comparable to that used by Pavlov to train his dogs. Its innovators, a group of English so-called psychologists, call it "aversion therapy." In this monstrous experiment, the unfortunate transvestite who is to be cured is given drugs which will cause nausea and vomiting. While under the influence of those drugs, he is made to watch the filmed act of a man dressing in women's clothes. In this way, after repeated doses of this stomach-turning conditioning, he will become nauseous when he thinks of cross-dressing, and will thus be "cured." He will not be able to go through with such an act without being made ill by it.

I believe the "therapy" has thus far had mixed results. It effected a couple of so-called cures, and also a couple of complete breakdowns, worsening the mental condition of the victims.

It is hard to believe that serious students could engage in such incredibly callous and stupid practices. Transvestism is a deviant conduct, yes, but it does not come out of thin air. It is derived from causes rooted in childhood and nurtured by real neurotic conflicts with society. Perhaps the means by which the individual relieves his tensions can be thwarted or shifted, but the cause of the tension is there and is not relieved. If the patient cannot relieve his mental pressure one way, he must and will find a different way. These noxious experimenters may be simply trading a socially harmless and strictly personal habit for one with dangerous anti-social potentials.

On the basis of what I have seen, read, and discussed with Val and others, I do not believe that transvestism can ever be cured. But it can be moderated, controlled, and kept within the limits of social tolerance. To achieve this is the wish of every tv and every tv's friend. What it requires is understanding, public enlightenment, and good counsel.

Chapter Fourteen

As the summer drew to a close, we took advantage of the absence of our children to cement our friendship with Gail and his group, and to experiment with the problem of full impersonation. If I were to appear "dressed" in a mass gathering, I did not want to appear too outrageous or too crude, although I knew that even if I did so, no one would say anything. There is a very careful code among tvs not to criticize each other's appearance, but I had my pride and I had seen what others could do.

No matter what the problem of one's own features as a man, it is possible by intelligent use of cosmetics and theatrical make-up to disguise blemishes, erase whisker shadow, and achieve at least the semblance of a female face. Anatomically the heads of both sexes are almost alike—there are some differences but the variation in individuals is great enough and wide enough to allow a lot of leeway. When you become conscious of the problem, you find yourself, as I did, studying the features of

women on streets and trains, and you realize that there are many who have one or another facial trait that could be called masculine: heavy jaw, large nose, wide teeth, sometimes poor skin or heavy eyebrows, and so on. We tend to look at the lovely women and let our eyes pass over the others. But the others are also women and no one doubts it.

The problem of the transvestite who is not blessed with small features and clear skin is not therefore insoluble. He may never be beautiful, but he can be made to pass a casual scrutiny. Such was my problem, and I consulted with my wife and with such experienced hands as Gail and Rae on its mastery.

We tried out various make-up techniques and eventually arrived at a tolerable effect. (Such experiments never quite end—one is always working at improvements and they can be found.) We did some shopping, acquiring a wardrobe for the occasion and a wig-substitute (the remarkable and cheap wig-hats were in vogue then, which could be brushed into a fair semblance of a hairdo, adequate for a private party).

The best effect for impersonation is found with a real wig, of course. There is nothing like real hair properly made up to give the illusion of femininity. Such a wig is a necessity for any tv cursed with the compulsion to go out and "pass" in public. Fortunately for me, I was and am still on the periphery of this thing and have never had the slightest desire for such risks.

This brings us back to Susanna. The reason that Susanna was and remains at the center of the New York transvestite circle is that Susanna is married to one of the best wigmakers in the city—one who has for years

catered to female impersonators, both professional and the secret amateur kind. Susanna's wife advertises regularly in transvestite publications, so it is her shop that is often the first port of call of unknown men seeking a wig for their locked-room exploits.

Naturally Susanna takes advantage of this situation to meet and greet such first-contacts, and it is at Susanna's apartment that many persons make their first face-to-face acquaintance with another of their kind.

I had, earlier in the summer, tried once again to have lunch with this Susanna and, though a phone appointment had been made, had again been left standing. If it were anyone else I would have washed my hands of the matter once and for all—indeed I was strongly inclined to—but my plan to attend the Hallowe'en affair made it imperative for me to give Susanna another chance.

This time however I would catch him at home in his own lair. I called him one morning in September. Yes, he was home. Yes, he'd be home all morning. I left my office at once, and headed uptown.

Finally I came face to face with Susanna. He was tall, dark-haired, fairly good-looking, with rather Latin features, and a soft, smooth voice with a slight Spanish accent. He welcomed me, we sat and had coffee—or at least I did while he had breakfast—and we talked for a couple of hours.

The apartment was a big, old-fashioned one that could hold a fair-sized gathering and had held many such. His main parlor held the wall-sized mirror that tvs favor and was, he explained, where most of the parties were held. There were other rooms used by tvs—a dressing room with a wardrobe and closet jammed with clothes and

lined with dozens of pairs of shoes, several wigs in evidence, a dressing table loaded with cosmetics, and photographs perched here and there.

Susanna is easy to talk to, intelligent, yet not inclined to domineer or be forceful. Meeting him solved one enigma for me—why it was that the New York world of transvestites was so loosely contained, never organized into any kind of formal clubs, and resistant to any such organizational attempts. It proved to me why, with Susanna the obvious and accepted center of society, nothing seemed to jell—as evidently it had in Los Angeles around the forceful, opinionated personality of Virginia.

Susanna was simply an easygoing type, not basically a leader and with no interest in becoming a leader. He had become the center of the group by virtue of his wife's position as hairdresser to most of the tvs active in the metropolis. But he was not at all inclined to boss anyone, to tell anyone what to do or how to do it, or to do anything at all except help those who asked for help, be tolerant of everyone who would be tolerant of him, and to enjoy having occasional gatherings at his place just for sheer sociability.

Susanna had opinions, and definite ones, and he expressed them forcefully in a regular column in the magazine, but he did not ask that anyone accept everything he said.

We chatted and got along fine. He apologized for standing me up twice—but said that in his line of work emergency calls came up that he had to break appointments for, and he had had no way of calling me to inform me, for I had never given him my office number. What was his work and who was Susanna?

I am not at liberty to give you his name, but I can say that he is a radio commentator who is well known internationally, that he has traveled far and wide on radio reportage, that he has talked with and is known to presidents and generals and makers of world history. He is a college graduate and a man with a good patriotic war record.

Susanna was not averse to talking of his own tv past. He had been born in South America, and in that continent an extreme emphasis on super-masculinity is a cult of the young men. He had left his homeland to avoid having to emulate that cult and had settled in the Midwest, taking American citizenship, and finishing his studies. He had first had a transvestic longing as a small boy, had fought it, embraced it, fought it again and again. Several times he had destroyed his small hoard of feminine clothing—once in order to marry—but each time the urge had caused him to return to cross-dressing to end the melancholia which would overcome him during prolonged abstinence.

Finally, with his first marriage on the rocks, he had decided that he was what he was and he would no longer fight it. He believed that "the girl within" had to be catered to every now and then to preserve his normal balance, and he did cater to "her." He had met his present wife while looking for a good wig, they had clicked, and they were happily married. She had no objections to his enlarging his circle of transvestite acquaintances—indeed why should she, for it meant increased business for her, and she is a very practical and down-to-earth sort of woman.

The Chevalier D'Eon Resort was the family property

and he had tried in the past few years to make it profitable as a refuge for tvs. It had not been able to sustain itself on that, but did cater to tvs outside of the summer season. Basically, it was a hunting lodge in a mountainous region about a hundred miles from the city.

There were indeed plans for a gala gathering on the weekend of Hallowe'en, but the rumors I had heard that it was to be the formative convention of Virginia's planned national organization were not true. Susanna would not permit the affair to be subverted to such a purpose, and no such formal program would be allowed. Virginia was coming East, though, and there would be others from around the country.

I signed up myself and wife for the occasion, then and there. We talked about the situation in the tv world, and Susanna brought out a letter he had just received from Virginia, which he allowed me to read.

Organized clubs may be of many kinds and purposes, but they all suffer from the clashes of human nature. Transvestite clubs apparently were not destined to be any different. The formal club in Los Angeles, the Hose & Heels Club, had just undergone a convulsion of its own, not dissimilar to what other clubs went through.

When I visited Virginia, I had heard that someone called Evelyn was a close associate of his and a strong influence in the local group. Now something had caused that friendship to fly apart, some personality clash, or similar vagary and, as a result, the club which had held its meetings at Evelyn's house changed meeting places, while Virginia arranged to vote Evelyn out of the organization. The affronted Evelyn, with wife in tow, insisted on admittance to the new meeting, and demanded a

hearing. What resulted seems to have been some sort of scuffle, hard words, and a shattered meeting.

According to Virginia's account of it in the letter, Evelyn stood branded as a pariah and everyone should take care not to allow him to make new contacts or help him form any new club or publication. Susanna and I agreed that this was a lot of silly nonsense, but that was the nature of Virginia's fanaticism. And it was also one reason why Susanna would not permit the gathering to be turned into a pitch for any special organization. Who needed this sort of dispute, when we had guilts enough as it was?

We parted with mutual esteem, and I returned to my office with instructions as to how to drive to the mysterious resort and its true name and location. Needless to say the name Chevalier D'Eon is an alias.

The next weeks flew by and the New York group was busy mobilizing for the big weekend. Somehow the word had got around about the idea of a convention and, though everyone agreed it would not be, that came to be the name attached to it. The query around town was, "Are you going to the convention?" Almost everybody was.

Mysterious activity around the Downtown Branch gave evidence of plans for organized entertainment. Some sort of rehearsals were going on, and an air of secrecy prevailed, though all in good spirit. My wife and I thought out our own actions for the weekend; we were a little scared but ready for the adventure. The weather got brisker, and I bought three rolls of color film for my camera.

Chapter Fifteen

Many people went up Friday night. My wife and I drove up Saturday morning. The weather was clear and cloudless, there was a sharp chill in the air, and it was a three-hour drive upstate. The last part of the drive took us along precipitous winding roads, near the edges of cliffs and higher and higher into mountains. This was hunting country, remote from major communities, too early for ski sports and too late for shooting and fishing.

Were we nervous? Of course. Who would not be? Were we afraid? No. From these people we had nothing to fear. But there was still that thrilling little tang in doing something secretive, something the rest of the world knew nothing about, something which might have an element of danger about it. For the night before, there had been a big costume ball in New York given by the N.V.A., an organization of actors and artists—and the police had suddenly raided it and arrested some thirty men who had attended in female costumes. The raid

had been unprecedented—the Hallowe'en affair had almost become traditional and there had never been any such interference before. But this time the arrest had taken place. It was, we believed, surely illegal for it had been a licensed, policed affair—and yet . . . (our belief in the illegality of the raid was justified, as the charges were dismissed two days later. But meanwhile note the embarrassment, the public pillorying of the party-goers who had been subjected to this official whimsy.)

There wasn't much chance that our weekend party would be raided. It was on private grounds, it was Hallowe'en. Still, there was a certain element of risk.

We followed instructions carefully, finally found ourselves on a narrow dirt road leading off the highway, and after a little winding, came upon the transvestite resort. It was a large area of many, many acres, of green lawn and wooded forest flanked by hills. A little stream ran through it. It was far enough away from the highway to be out of sight from passers-by and there were no neighbors to speak of. Here was the place where men could go when they wished, dress as they pleased, and wander around without fear.

There was a large main building, another large structure which had once been a barn and was now converted to a sort of dance hall-auditorium, and there were two groups of fairly large cabins spread out in rows away from the main house. There were a great many cars parked before the main building, including more than one Cadillac, Corvette, Thunderbird, and many out-of-state license plates in evidence.

No one was in sight when we parked in the lot. It was around lunchtime, and when we stepped through the

door of the main building, we entered a large room packed with people finishing lunch. About eighty per cent of the men in sight were already wigged and dressed, but there were others who weren't and as we made our way through the crowd we were relieved to see a few people we knew. Rae, clad in hunting shirt and heavy boots, waved to us, and Susanna, in wig, blouse, and skirt came working his way up and said for us to make our way inside, arrange to get something to eat, and he'd fix us up in one of the cabins.

We managed to get through the packed room on into a second group of tables placed around the kitchen, where more were dining, waving to Jessica and Buff and Karen, and I caught sight of a smiling big blonde, at the same time that "she" spotted me. It was Annette, my friend of the Far West, and along with the big blonde were the wife and two friends.

I lost my nervousness then, and introduced my wife, whose impressions of Annette are the same as mine—a wholly nice person—and we began to fit ourselves into the pattern of the day.

Without trying to further itemize our activities, I will attempt to bring some order out of the kaleidoscopic impressions of the next thirty-six hours. The gathering did have a program. It had started informally on Friday afternoon. Friday evening there had been perhaps thirty people present and they had dressed and partied in the main building most of the night. Saturday started off late—what we were witnessing was a combined breakfast-lunch. The bulk of the attendees arrived Saturday morning; my wife and I were among the last.

Saturday afternoon after eating, everyone gathered at

the other building, where there was a small stage. There was a brief formal meeting, the only business session that was scheduled there. Virginia, who had arrived in New York two days before, gave a talk on his organizational ideas. Susanna took over and introduced two guests. Dr. Hugo G. Beigel, professor of psychology at Long Island University, a distinguished white-haired gentleman, was present as a student of the phenomenon of transvestism. Dr. Beigel had treated a number of cases and was trusted for the honesty of his approach. The other important guest was Dr. Wardell Pomeroy, of the Kinsey Institute.

Dr. Pomeroy stood up, took a slight bow, and informed everyone that the Institute was engaging in research on transvestism, among other things, having in mind a comprehensive report on it for publication in a few years' time. He explained that he was there as an objective observer, that the Institute did not draw any conclusions—moral or otherwise—but merely was interested in getting the statistical facts. He held up a movie camera he had with him and explained that he would, with everyone's permission, take films at random of what was going on. He wanted to inform everyone that the pictures he took would be the confidential property of the Institute, not available to the public in any way, and would be locked in the private vaults of the Foundation. There were no objections to his request.

After this gathering and some further discussion, that meeting broke up. There would be a few free hours—the sun was beginning to set—dinner, and then the big party of the evening.

We were put up at the end cabin of one of the far

rows. The resort was full up, and what was worse, it was not equipped for the heavy crowd. Basically the cabins were summer places, not insulated, and the weather was getting colder and colder. Winter was setting in that night.

The first thing any tv who was at the "convention" mentions is the cold. Everyone outside the main building froze. It must have hit zero by midnight. What was worse, the hot water system broke down and the gas line broke down and there was no heat whatsoever in the mountain cabins . . . and not enough blankets either. Fortunately I had been warned to bring blankets, so we did not suffer more than a minimum of frost.

After dinner, everyone scattered to dress for the party. This was to be my first appearance among others in feminine garb, and I wanted to do my best. I had already spotted some among the guests who would surely look a lot worse than I possibly could, so I felt moderately confident. Trying to dress in a frigid cabin was not exactly easy—it was certainly remote from the ideal conditions of one's home—but by-and-by we went on down to the dance hall.

We had been meeting new people all afternoon, being introduced to names we had read about or heard about, or people we knew nothing of. We sensed a general air of fun and a spirit of tolerance and welcome. Everyone was friends and it was a good feeling, despite the oddness of the occasion.

The party had a short but delightful program. The Downtown Branch had been rehearsing a singing skit, wherein three in matching gowns mimicked singers, while from behind the curtain, a phonograph played

actual songs. Having rehearsed it, they were immensely effective.

My friends from Canada, Irene and Fiona, had garbed themselves as two ballerinas and put on a comical parody of Swan Lake, tossing each other around with high abandon.

There was a "fashion show" at which the best and most elaborate of the attendees paraded. There was a Spanish dance by Susanna, who had studied this and had occasionally performed professionally. After which there were just socializing, refreshments, some dancing . . .

Dancing at a tv gathering is something one does not often see. The protocol of dancing at a heterosexual gathering where everyone looks like the one sex, the female, would baffle an Emily Post. Generally the issue is avoided. At this affair a few married couples dared it, and that was that.

There were seventy-one men at that party, the high point of the convention. All were in dresses, high heels, jewelry, wigs (or wig-hats, for there were a sizable number of the older ones who did not have wigs of their own), and make-up ranging from a slight dash of lipstick to elaborate cosmetic artistry. They ranged in age from the early twenties to the middle sixties. They included an astonishing number of well-to-do persons with a variety of impressive backgrounds. There was absolutely no evidence of homosexuality or off-color comment, talk, or activities.

I had come to know something about most of the men who were there. I recall sitting there watching the crowd of pseudo-women having fun and thinking to myself that this was no bunch of creampuffs or weak sisters.

There were sufficient ex-Navy men and retired flag officers there to crew and command a small war vessel.

There were enough trained aviation and Air Force personnel to put a medium bomber into the air and fly it anywhere on an action mission.

There were enough veterans, reserve soldiery, and Marines there to take an enemy machine-gun nest.

There was a commissioner of police from a medium-sized New England city and enough men with peace-officer standing and training to police a township.

There were enough first-class engineers, designers, inventors, and managerial executives there to run a small high-technology plant.

And there were lots of plain hard-working men of all the other professions: salesmen, insurance men, editors, artists, writers, radio and television engineers and broadcasters, lawyers, chemists, accountants, and storekeepers.

Most of these men were married, most of them were fathers. A few had brought their wives—there were, I believe, some nine wives present.

It was in its own way an impressive demonstration. There were guests present from the Far West, the South, the Midwest, from Canada, and from all over the East Coast.

There were more transvestites present in one room at that moment than at any previous time in the known history of humanity. It was in its own way an historic occasion. It was also a sign of the times.

Chapter Sixteen

The party broke up in the small hours of the morning, and gradually all the participants retired to their frigid rooms to fight the approaching freeze. To the best of my knowledge there were no actual cases of frostbite, but tvs who were there still tell hilarious anecdotes of trying to keep warm by climbing into bed wearing all their clothes, male and female simultaneously, and piling the blankets on top of them!

By the time we rallied on Sunday morning for breakfast, the ice—actual and social—had been broken and conversation around the tables in the main building was easy and affable. When my wife and I made our way in, most people were up and working on coffee and eggs and whatnot. About two-thirds were still cross-dressed: the real die-hards like Virginia and Jessica and Gail. There was a mad assortment of clothing, and a general air of good humor.

We found ourselves at a long table with Dr. Pomeroy,

Virginia's wife, and a number of persons we hadn't known before. My wife chatted with the distinguished Kinsey researcher, who made some observations I do not think right to quote on hearsay. The blond-wigged person across from me turned out to be one of the Navy types—a retired officer—and we talked briefly about his family problem—his wife had known of his activities almost from the day of their marriage. They had been married for more than two decades and she still did not approve, but they had compromised to the point where she simply looked the other way and avoided mentioning it.

Another old married couple at our table had nearly paralleled my own experience. He had told his wife only a few months ago and this was her first encounter with tvs en masse. It worked out differently—for they had arrived on Friday night, Saturday she had suddenly fled the place, but she had returned again Sunday morning, after spending the night alone in a motel thinking it out with herself. She seemed temporarily reconciled, though I have learned since that they are still very much at loggerheads.

All around me people were drifting around, introducing themselves to those they had not met, chatting. In the kitchen, another ex-seaman, with tattooed arms, was working out the weekend by subbing as cook, wearing a nightgown under a bathrobe, while another helper scurried about waiting on tables.

Later I wandered around renewing acquaintances made the night before, chatting with people, saying hello to persons I had heard of but had not previously seen.

There was for instance Vicky, the one who seemed to be the focus of what could be called the Midtown group.

Vicky was a big easygoing, good-natured man, wearing a shaggy fur coat over nightwear, wigged, and moderately made up. Vicky was a talented person—an expert mechanic, good photographer, and skilled at carving.

There was Gloria, a six-foot-four "steel" magnate from the Midwest, reputedly a multi-millionaire, whose fabulous wardrobe cost him thousands a year—his generosity was famous, for his gowns were always made to order and he rarely wore them more than once, giving them away to other oversize tvs. He had been at the party the night before in a cloth-of-gold gown that would have dazzled high society. Gloria was too big to pass the eye, but photographically was superb.

There was a young man who claimed to be a descendant of European nobility; he was generally referred to as The Countess. This person had put in an appearance shortly after our own entry the day before and I recall seeing him come in—a tall, veiled, mysterious-looking woman, right out of E. Phillips Oppenheim. The Countess delighted in just such a role, having a decidedly dramatic flair. At the "fashion show," he had appeared in a heavy satin gown, hand-embroidered with sequins and jewels, which he said he had spent two years remodeling, it having been his mother's wedding gown. The Countess, fair of feature, could and did pass.

Another tall person was one my wife pointed out to me as the most truly feminine of all the tvs. This one was a middle-aged man who, after struggling with two unhappy marriages, had decided to declare his independence by living as a woman permanently. Having his own business—he was an importer of scientific materials—he had, in the words of Gail, jumped all the intervening

steps from the locked room, and was making good on his effort to establish a twenty-four-hour-a-day female personality.

There was a businessman from Illinois who only dressed once a year—at a Hallowe'en party or ball. This one, perfectly groomed, expertly made up, beautifully wigged, as you might expect of a person who had probably planned his costume for months in advance, proceeded to outrage everyone by opening his purse, withdrawing a cigar, and lighting up!

I exchanged phone numbers with a rather pleasant man from New Jersey whose photograph I had taken at his request. He had never owned a wig before and therefore had never been pictured entirely as a woman, and wanted to see how he looked. Darlene, as he chose to be called, was a married man with children, an engineer, and he said he would welcome a visit some day.

A couple from Westchester were oddly similar in make-up, both the young husband and the young wife, going in for the same type of heavy cosmetic preparation. This man was astonishingly good—one of the best apparent beauties present, a dazzling blonde. The wife drifted around without self-consciousness, commenting loudly on things and people.

The strangest character was one I think of as The Mad Scientist. This curious person had attracted our attention the night before by displaying his combination necklace and earrings—he had pierced ears and had attached the strand of a heavy necklace to earrings, so that the whole weight dangled from his lobes. An obvious masochist, the eccentricity was even more noticeable in the morning, for he was then dressed in male

clothing, in what he claimed to be his normal wear. He said he was an inventor, had his own laboratory, and I suppose that was true, for otherwise he could not have gotten away with wearing high-heeled shoes, long lacquered pointed fingernails and dangling earrings as a part of his regular daily garb.

Fiona was present that morning first as a girl—we took some comical pictures of him posing on the porch hammock—and then later I saw him for the first time as he really was, a good-looking, rather chunky and quite masculine Briton.

The day drew on. A lot of the people were indulging in photography, posing on the lawn, draping themselves over fancy sports cars, and borrowing each other's cameras.

I watched Virginia walking through the woods with Dr. Beigel, earnestly trying to explain to the psychologist the special philosophy that the Californian had evolved. I understand Dr. Beigel was not convinced.

People began saying goodbye. Arrangements were made to pilot Annette and his wife around New York for the next couple of days. My wife and I invited Virginia and his wife for dinner the following day—which invitation was accepted. And finally we said our farewells, and started out on the long drive home.

It had been quite a weekend. Nothing wild, nothing orgiastic, nothing to offend outside of the cross-dressing manifestation itself. This is the typical pattern of tv gatherings. The public may expect some sort of weird orgies; anyone who attends such a party with such an idea is bound to be severely disappointed.

Aftermath: we did have several people at our place

the next evening, Virginia and wife and Gail and others. There was some scurrying about as airline reservations were checked, some people were seen off to the airport, and goodbyes were said. Virginia stayed in the city another day, then flew westward on business calls, and finally flew the last lap of his trip dressed and got away with it.

The next weeks went by peacefully. It was clear then that I had freedom of entry into tv groups around New York, which freedom was not exercised very often; for the fever which had possessed me earlier that year had for the most part waned, and transvestism was no longer obsessional.

Perhaps the final step in the relationship of our marriage to this thing should be described now, though it did not happen until three months later. My wife had almost entirely lost her qualms and private worries, but it took a visit to Darlene to demolish this concern.

I had sent the New Jersey man the photos I had taken, had received a thank-you note and again a suggestion that we visit. Finally, on a Sunday in February, my wife and I decided to do so.

We drove out to the New Jersey community where Darlene lived, and pulled up in front of his ranch-type house in a well-kept development. Our friend opened the door, a good-looking, fair-haired man in his early thirties (recall that I had never seen him as a man, any more than I had seen Fiona, until the weekend in the mountains . . . so strange is this field that one can meet and have friends without knowing what they actually look like most of the time!), wearing slacks and a sweater.

We shook hands, went in, and met his wife, a pleasant young woman, and his three children. The question of tvs with children was always a touchy one. I had experienced it with Annette and found the real problem still unsolved. In Darlene's home we ran into it in full bloom.

For Darlene, though seemingly in male garb, actually wasn't. The slacks were women's, the sweater was feminine, and the blue embroidered flats he wore were not male.

We talked about this at length. He had a very matter-of-fact viewpoint, with which his wife concurred.

He had been a secret tv since boyhood. He had married after his discharge from the service, and he had tried to kick the habit. After a few months of marriage, he had become more and more withdrawn, sitting around evenings silent and moody, and finally his wife demanded to know what was bothering him. He then told her about his compulsion for women's wear. She took it in her stride, was not at all upset, and suggested that he go ahead and dress as he pleased at home. He was a hard worker, an engineer, augmenting his salary with extra work nights, and he deserved to do what he wanted if it gave him relaxation. Since then, Darlene always changes clothes when he comes home from work. He does not necessarily wear dresses—slacks are more likely—but his shoes, underwear, and night clothes will always be feminine.

His children have grown up in a house where what Daddy does is simply what Daddy has always done and they take it for granted, without questioning. He is definitely the man of the house, a strong masculine personality, yet kind, gentle, considerate. Their father

image is not really impaired although from one viewpoint it might be weakened once his children get into adolescence and the dangerous teens.

Yet this is the way it is in that house, and this is the way it has to be. That's the nature of their father, an eccentricity, but one that does not impair the fact that he is a good provider, a good husband, a good father, and that theirs is and has always been a happy home. For father to stop his curious dressing habits would jeopardize their happiness. It wouldn't be worth it.

My wife and I talked this over as we drove home. Suppose I said, that Darlene were not a tv, but had some of the other vices that are so much more common around American homes. How many homes in this country are marred by the fact that the father is a compulsive horse player, a bettor, a gambler? How many homes are made miserable by the father's drinking? How many by his philandering? How many by endless bickering and snarling and wife-husband fighting?

Would it be better if Darlene were a gambler, a bully, a drunk, a lech? If he had to have a weakness—and in our present crisis-ridden society, who does not have some weakness? Who is not hounded by some neurosis?—this desire for soft, pretty clothes is surely the most innocuous, the least harmful to the family harmony.

Of course it would be best if the father were never seen so dressed by the children, for there must be some harm done by this confusion of the sexual image. Most tv fathers, as I have said, try to keep it secret from the growing child, for it can provoke in the son's mind a wish to emulate the father, and it can provoke in the daughter

a wish to find a man with father's habit—neither of which is a "normal" image.

(And still the thought lingers—what image of daddy has the child of the profligate, the boozer, the tout?)

When we got home, my wife said to me, "I'm glad we visited that home. I have been feeling that we had a skeleton in our closet. I no longer feel that way. I feel that the spectre has vanished."

Chapter Seventeen

Things settled down into a sort of pattern. The tv world in New York is easygoing; nothing is done on much advance notice; there are no formal activities; people simply contact people when they feel like it or drop out of sight when they don't feel like it.

Tvs, for instance, are addicted to periodic attempts to break the habit. One would notice the absence of someone, only to be advised that he was undergoing analysis and was trying to break out of dressing. He would have everyone's sympathy, but the general attitude was, wait, he'll be back, and it was unfortunately generally so. Sooner or later, he'd show up again.

The big events were the parties. As a rule there might be one every two or three months—usually at Susanna's. Nobody sent out notices, but people told people, generally without much prior timing, and if you happened to be free and in the mood that particular night, why, you could go up to Susanna's and join in.

My wife and I attended our first party at Susanna's in December—a sort of pre-Christmas party. This was another mildly nervous occasion for me because, even though I had attended the resort affair, this time it would mean dressing in someone else's house and possibly in the presence of others.

We arrived, found a lot of dressed tvs there already, gathered, chatting, the record player going. Susanna told me where to go to dress, I went in lugging the suitcase that is the accompaniment of most such party-goers, and found three others in the dressing room, in slips and in various stages of make-up.

There is an unwritten protocol in this situation—one does not comment to or even directly look at one's neighbor. You simply go about your own dressing, minding your own business, and nobody is going to be critical or annoying. Ask for help and you'll get it, but otherwise you could just as well be alone. It is clear that it would have to be that way—there is a matter of embarrassment and there is the studied effort to avoid anything that would show any improper interest.

When dressed, join the group. There are always some experts who dress at home and drive over. There are always others who would not be caught dead on the streets and who dress only at the party. But nobody draws any conclusions from that; there is no snobbishness and no adverse criticism, no matter how awkward a person may be.

Women are always present at these parties, wives, and sometimes just friends. They are vastly out-numbered by pseudo-women but, again, nobody gets upset. And in general it can be said that a tv party is no orgy. In fact

such parties are singularly well mannered and tame, mostly breaking into little conversational groups.

One always meets new people, even so soon after the big affair. This time we met another six-foot-two in a blond wig, whose first contact was that very gathering.

Obviously in this person was another who had dressed in secret for years without knowing of others or knowing how to make contacts. A married man with children, in a high-wage bracket working for a major publisher, this man had first heard of the magazine only a week before. He had then asked about transvestites of his dressmaker (I am quoting him . . . as implied, he had dresses made regularly) and that dressmaker said she would ask around. She did, and came up in a couple days with the name of Susanna's wife, and, in turn, that made the final connection.

Did this person's wife know? She did and she didn't like it and she didn't keep track of what her husband was up to. He kept his stock of clothing in the locked trunk of a car and evidently dressed only in motels on business trips.

This pattern is characteristic of many case histories. Where the home is barred for dressing, motels must make do, and I suspect that many an unnecessary business trip is launched just for the purpose of relaxing behind a locked motel door.

We met one of the formerly more active tvs who had been inactive as far as the social group knew all that year. This was Edith, who had passed on many occasions, and was some sort of machinist. One story we heard about Edith was that he was bold enough to put in a day's work in the plant, then when quitting time came,

contrive to dress and get wigged in the locker room, and leave the factory by a back door as Edith! Evidently he had gotten away with this maneuver, though offhand it seems irresponsibly risky.

I heard also of a practicing psychiatrist who is himself a transvestite. He is apparently capable in his profession, and has the ethical sense to refuse to treat anyone suffering from the same complaint. Is that any reason why he could not sympathetically consider the problems of other people? I don't know the answer.

As our life stabilized itself and my wife and I were able to put this strange new influence into manageable perspective, the idea of my writing this book began to grow. It was my wife's feeling that this was a social discovery with social meaning, and that the world should be informed by someone with sympathetic understanding of it.

I toyed with the idea of recounting my feelings and experiences, and found it at first a little unnerving and yet also not a little compelling. I began to consider from what angle to approach it, and decided it would have to be strictly my own story. What I had to say could only be what I myself had seen and felt.

By that time, I was aware that my state of mind in the first three months of 1962 had been definitely disturbed, abnormal. I realized that I had gone through some sort of nervous breakdown or psychic trauma. But this had been mainly allayed, my mind had returned to something like normality, and my judgment was back on a less emotional, more logical course. My correspondence with Val had done a lot to talk out my concerns. My

meeting and later correspondence with other people had helped.

I began to think that what my book should cover was therefore a single year of my life, the year of my discovery of this strange hidden world. It should begin with my March visit to the man who called himself Virginia.

On my first meeting with Virginia, I had been disturbed, under terrible mental pressure, and my views of that evening and the conversations I had had were surely colored by my condition. My wife's impression of Virginia when she had met him in October were rather different from mine, and I already was able to see him in somewhat different perspective.

Then logically this book should end with a return visit when I could view Virginia with the normal eyes of a normally rational man, armed now with experience, information, and the ability to judge for myself. I decided this would be my goal. In addition, I had never attended a meeting of an organized tv club. Such a meeting, I felt, should be reported in the book I contemplated.

Besides the Hose & Heels Club in Los Angeles, there were at least seven other clubs meeting regularly around the United States—that is, that anyone knew of. But the one Virginia ran was evidently the most successful.

I had some descriptions of its meetings, as other New Yorkers had attended as guests during visits they had made. The club met twice a month. One meeting was a formal, non-dressing gathering, which was usually given over to mutual analysis, a lecture by a psychologist or by Virginia, and serious discussion. The second meeting of the month was for party purposes and was a dress-up

affair without too much official business. I thought it would be nice if I could time one of my business trips to Los Angeles with that latter meeting.

I knew that things were not stable in Los Angeles. I had already read about the split between Evelyn and Virginia. Now there was news of some sort of split between Virginia and Barbara Ellen, his business associate. But apparently the club was still meeting. Among my correspondents was another Barbara—Barbara Jean, who was the vice-president of this Los Angeles club—and he had not indicated that the disputes had altered club procedures.

I must mention two trivialities now: Shortly after the Hallowe'en "convention" I had dropped a note to Virginia's secretary asking that any photographs taken there of me not be used in the magazine, and indicating that I did not approve of calling it a convention. I also enclosed a bit of doggerel I had written in an expansive mood, parodying a folk song, in which I had made some reference to the brawl at the Hose & Heels Club in August. There had been no reply to this note.

Along about February of 1963, I decided it was time to write to Virginia and ask for a good date to make my visit, and to seek permission to attend one of the party meetings of the club.

A week went by without an answer. A second week went by: still no answer. I wanted to adjust my business calendar, for this was a business trip and would require making a number of appointments in advance, and if I did not hear from Virginia in time, it would be hit or miss if I had to establish a date myself.

In the third week, I got my reply. It was a cold, scolding letter, in which I was informed that outside visitors were not allowed at the club, and that meant me; that the doggerel I had written in November was inaccurate and therefore harmful; that if I had any objections to what he was going to print or say, I shouldn't have mentioned them to his secretary but directly to him (which was absurd because I happened to know he opened his own mail—he had done so during my first visit), and finally he would agree to meet me again, even so, provided I would not contact or meet Barbara Jean. Of course, meeting Evelyn or Barbara Ellen would be totally out of the question—they were now pariahs—but adding Barbara Jean was a new touch.

I was stunned, angry, and bewildered. I did not know this Evelyn and had no likelihood of contacting whoever that was. Barbara Ellen I had met and liked, but had no home address or means of making contact. However, Barbara Jean was a correspondent of mine—by mail a nice person who had already expressed his pleasure at the chance to meet me.

For a couple days I was perplexed as to what course to pursue. Finally I established a week for my visit, informed Barbara Jean by letter of my plans and the situation, and advised him that it was important that I meet Virginia again for my mental health's sake, and perhaps I would not therefore be able to see him, if Virginia could convince me of a good reason not to. I then wrote to Virginia telling him I would arrive.

Barbara Jean wrote back that he understood but that, if I could see my way to it, he and his wife would be very happy to see me and probably they could arrange some sort of social affair with others.

Chapter Eighteen

What could have been a pleasant visit and a quiet good time in the presence of congenial people now looked like a turbulent situation. I was obviously caught in some sort of conflict. By inquiring, I learned that Barbara Jean had made the mistake of continuing friendship with both factions, the Evelyn-Barbara Ellen group and the Virginia loyalists. Evidently Virginia refused to tolerate any such duality. Security was an all-embracing thing with Virginia and any association with persons he had come to deem antagonistic or in opposition were *per se* a danger to security. The exact nature of the opposition was a mystery to anyone outside Los Angeles.

When I flew to Los Angeles on a Saturday late in March, I did not know what course I would pursue. I would see Virginia on the first day, give him every chance to persuade me of the justice of his case, and then think it over. If he were right, then his advice to avoid Barbara Jean would be heeded. I had my own security to guard.

Once again I called Virginia from a motel room. There was no answer. I called all afternoon, and no answer. I was beginning to wonder whether to call Barbara Jean after all and damn the consequences, when finally I got Virginia at home. He had been working outside the house repairing damages done by a storm a few days ago and had not heard the phone.

Virginia and his wife met me at the motel a half hour later and we all went out to dinner. We talked once again about things non-transvestic, about science and society, and after dinner we drove back to his home in the hills. His wife excused herself, while Virginia and I sat in his living room, where we had sat a year before, and he then talked about his troubles.

The nature of the fight with Evelyn I never did get to the roots of—it superficially involved a difference of philosophy and a matter of meeting-place conveniences—but when it turned out that Evelyn had been Virginia's best friend for ten years, obviously whatever had occasioned the present feud must have been more serious than those matters.

The case with Barbara Ellen was different. It was a matter of business—an argument related to their publishing operation and to the exact status Bob Stevens had in the business. The dispute over this had been complicated and aggravated by the sudden breakup of Bob's marriage, in which Virginia had taken the wife's side. In consequence, Barbara Ellen was now depicted as a most dangerous type, a very devil, whose antics would surely put the jealously guarded subscription list of the magazine in jeopardy. This was the matter of security—and Virginia was all-out to block any access to that list.

As for Barbara Jean, he was dangerous simply because he tried to remain neutral. No one must be neutral when that sacred list was in danger.

As he talked, Virginia showed me some of the documents in the fight between himself and his associates, and he seemed open and aboveboard. His attitude toward his former friends was clearly hysterically emotional, attributing to them evils not found outside of Dante's Inferno. Whereas a year ago, I had been the disturbed man and he the calming influence, I now found that our positions were reversed. It was Virginia who was going through what looked very much like a nervous breakdown and I who was trying to act as the level-headed adviser.

I offered to try to act as go-between, as a disinterested outsider from the East, but Virginia forbade this in no uncertain terms. Any contact, any contact at all, would surely be disastrous.

When Virginia drove me home, I was almost inclined to agree with him. I kept asking myself who was the more important. Was my contact with this man, who was the head and center of the tv world, worth my isolation during the rest of my stay in Los Angeles, worth my shunning a friend known only through correspondence? Could I not take a chance at peace-making anyway? I felt calm, level-headed, my guilt erased. Perhaps, without his willing it, I could help him.

Sunday and Monday went by without my making a decision. I didn't know what to do. Tuesday, I pondered the matter all morning. My schedule was very tight. I had Tuesday evening and Friday evening open—and I did not like the idea of losing those nights to loneliness

and boredom. Early in the afternoon, I resolved the conflict. If I could not trust myself, who else could I trust? I phoned Barbara Jean.

A laughing voice informed me, when I had introduced myself, that I was talking to the "Enemy Camp" and did I know that? I chuckled back, and said I was aware of it. One thing I knew then (actually I have always known it): A sense of humor is a sure safeguard for all tension-tossed men—and if you haven't got a sense of humor it's bad. Virginia, I knew from experience, did not have a sense of humor. But a dozen words on the phone with the self-styled "Enemy Camp" told me that this Barbara Jean wasn't neurotic and obsessed. We arranged to meet for dinner.

I met B.J. that night with his charming wife and we had a very warm and pleasant time. Two delightful people, sparkling, intelligent, with a touch of humor, and a great deal of natural charm. B.J. is rising in his field, head of his own business, and they have a lovely home in one of the outlying communities of Los Angeles. He is an amateur artist of talent; he has a huge wardrobe; and his wife goes along with his little hobby and seems genuinely to enjoy the people she meets. B.J. showed me around his place, showed me some of his stock of clothes —he got many as gifts from the Midwest steelman we had met at the resort—he liked to go in for marabou fur and the more elaborate froufrou.

Before we parted, B.J. said there was to be a party on Friday night and did I want to go. I said if I attended I would surely be deemed an outcast from Virginia's company, but yes, I wanted to go regardless of the risk.

That Friday evening I packed a bag and waited. I did

not know where the party was to be or who would be there. Virginia had said the Saturday before that perhaps he could get up some friends, but he had never called me. B.J. and wife finally arrived.

We drove somewhere in Los Angeles, parked before a big private house. Taking our bags, we went in. Several people were there already, and a party was in the making. A large gray-haired woman came up to me smiling and holding out her hand. I took a second look, puzzled a moment, and then realized that this was Barbara Ellen, whom I had seen a year ago only in his male counterpart. And a moment later a very impressive middle-aged lady put in an appearance, strikingly feminine in voice and manner, and this turned out to be Evelyn.

I was in the Enemy Camp for sure.

It was a very pleasant evening. There was a nice crowd there, and nobody discussed Virginia or the arguments once. Not once. If this were the Enemy Camp, they were certainly not engaging in active warfare. All the shooting was from Virginia's group.

Several local tvs were present, and a group had come down from San Francisco, with their wives, while others had driven up from communities to the south.

Evelyn was a good host and Evelyn's wife another woman who knew how to make tvs feel entirely at home. Married to a remarkable person, she respected others whose inclinations were similar. Evelyn, I learned, utilized still another feminine name and personality, under which he had at times experimented in living as a woman. This seemed to be a case of a true split personality—a *Three Faces of Eve* situation—for Evelyn admitted that he did not have full recollection of what

happened in his life during the time that other feminine personality was in control! It seemed "she" kept a diary of "her" activities, and kept it locked, and Evelyn, when his normal male self, did not know what was in that diary. He respected his other self's right to privacy and didn't attempt to open it!

We chatted, I met new people, took photographs, and soon the night was spent. As we prepared to leave, Evelyn suggested I come over on Sunday and share breakfast with him—as I had to leave for New York at noon that day. I said I'd ring him.

Saturday morning Virginia finally called my motel. He seemed distressed that I had not contacted him, he did not know about the party, and we talked about his troubles for three-quarters of an hour. He ended by suggesting I come up for breakfast on Sunday.

Sunday morning I found myself with two dates. I decided to call Virginia. I did so. He answered angrily, he had evidently learned of my attendance at the Enemy Camp, and I was no longer in good grace. So I called Evelyn, and breakfasted with him and Barbara Ellen. They told me of their troubles with the Hose & Heels Club—a meeting of which I could not have attended as it had simply broken up with the expulsion of Barbara Jean. They discussed the situation and I urged peace, doing my best to show them the futility of continuing to harass one as upset as Virginia was.

Barbara Ellen explained his case to me as far as the business of the magazine was concerned. It seemed to be a fair presentation, but I told him then that he could never win, for I was certain that Virginia would destroy

lists and properties before allowing even a court decision to interfere.

We parted friends, and I flew back to New York feeling that I had managed to have an interesting time in spite of what looked like a sour beginning.

In the time that has passed since my visit, it has become apparent that my advice to drop the fight finally took effect, because Virginia is once again in the clear; Evelyn and Barbara Ellen have gone their separate ways and there is a general truce in Los Angeles. There is also, alas, no club there any more. Perhaps someday Virginia will reorganize one. I wonder if I will ever be allowed to attend?

Chapter Nineteen

Twenty per cent of all known transvestites are engineers. Would anyone care to estimate what percentage of engineers are transvestites?

Nobody will ever know how much of America's prowess in space flight and missile progress is due to transvestite engineers and technicians, but it can be stated as fact that not a single U.S. vehicle ever got into space that did not pass through the hands of transvestites—and not just once but in many areas!

Percentagewise engineering and associated technologies occupy a widely disproportionate place in the statistics of known tvs. These statistics show an overload generally on behalf of the better educated and the middle class, but that could be discounted in part because of the difficulty poorer and less erudite tvs must encounter in making contact with the growing nucleus of the main group. In any case, the overload in favor of defense technicians cannot be argued away.

I recall once chatting with three tvs when the subject came up. I realized that each of the three was a graduate engineer; two were connected with missile work. I asked each at what point in his life did he find himself dressing regularly. The answers were identical. Each found the urge to dress too powerful to resist during the second year of his college engineering courses. There was, it was explained to me, so heavy a burden of cold mathematics and concentrated exact studies that relief had to be found and each found it in cross-dressing. One would do his evening studies in the privacy of his quarters, while wearing high-heeled shoes and nylons. Another told the same story, and the third would robe himself in blouse and skirt before pursuing his studies. They felt that the changing gave them a certain relief of mind, enabled them to continue their work, go on to graduation and careers. But the habit, which took hold in college, remained.

There is evidently something very sick about the engineering profession. Not only is the course of study so lacking in emotional warmth as to bring out the need to acquire emotional warmth in some way, but it must be a grind hard enough to strain any sensitive person's psychic backbone.

And then consider that it continues and gets worse as the engineer goes into his career in full. I find nothing strange about that. Of all the futile and frustrating tasks that of the engineer working on rocketry and military aviation must be the greatest. The efforts of their minds, the triumphs of their talents, must be devoted to projects whose ultimate use would be to destroy, not to create. Engineering built our society and its wonders, but the

engineer's work today goes to a secret, military-ruled Pandora's box of doom and death.

What must a man feel who knows that if his work is ever put into actual use it will result in the death, maiming, and burning by fire of millions of innocent women and children, the blasting of great cities and ancient heritages, the destruction of green fields and flowing forests, the blackening of the air, the turning of wealth into poverty, of fertile land into desert?

Yet work they must and this is the work they do—glorying on the one hand in a job well executed and hoping on the other hand that it is all to be worthless, never to be used. Could there be any greater frustration than that? What more could a sick society produce sicker than the fine minds who must work in secrecy and solely for the creation of disaster?

It is no wonder that, where there are the seeds of transvestism, this sick profession fertilizes and brings to fruition those seeds. I only wonder what other sick seeds are being flowered in the same barren soil—the pages of abnormal psychology catalogue a hundred horrors of which transvestism is surely the most innocuous.

The seeds of transvestism are planted in millions of boyish minds, along with other erotic impulses, but they can be brought to bloom only by various complex situations of adolescence. In most these seeds become sterile, find no ground for flowering. The complexity of the manners in which these seeds grow to compulsive proportions are many and can not be simply classified. The more tvs one meets, the more it becomes obvious that each derives from a tangled knot of many causes. To become a transvestite requires the conflux of several psychologi-

cal streams—and these vary in every instance.

Nonetheless the frustrations of a sick society create the atmosphere and the conditions in which these seeds can flourish, and flourish they do today in America. I have come to the opinion that transvestism is the American sickness, in the same way that flagellation was the English sickness of Victorian days. The heavy stress throughout American literature, films, television, advertising on femininity and feminine beauty is no accident. Minds verging on cross-sex work in that way and every American boy goes through puberty and adolescence confronted on every side by the image of female beauty as the desired ideal. Even purely masculine products are advertised by shapely models. And one cannot read the daily papers without siphoning the news between columns of high-heeled shoe ads and girdle and bra sales displays.

Millions of men do not cross-dress and never even realize the thought but they unconsciously find themselves driven to exercise their unspoken desires through various impinging fields—women's wear industry, feminine stress in advertising, curious manifestations in the selection of their wives' clothing and accessories, or even the joining of fraternities addicted to fancy dress regalia. There is never a masquerade ball given in this country where a number of perfectly prosaic businessmen do not manage to show up in female disguise . . . probably not even aware of the motive that picks that costume over all others. And is there anyone not familiar with the partying drunk who invariably ends up by trying on the ladies' hats amid loud guffaws?

The seeds of transvestism are everywhere and in mil-

lions of men, and our sick society is bringing these seeds to fruition on a scale never before seen. It is the most hush-hush growth known—it is not written up, it is omitted from psychology studies, even Kinsey didn't cover the subject in his questionnaires. But the secret files of the Armed Services could tell the story and the files of local police would turn up the traces. There is no wig shop or corsetiere who does not have at least one open male customer—and a lot more buying through their women folk. The same could be said of "Tall Girl" shops.

Careful estimate of the number of adult males in this country over the age of sixteen who know themselves to be transvestites puts the rock bottom figure as 80,000, or about one in every thousand adult men. This is the most conservative estimate and, if one considers those who only indulge at limited times and through careful subterfuges, I think a figure of a half million not too unlikely.

Do you know what this means? If we settle for a figure somewhere between, say one man in every three hundred (over the age of sixteen), how many transvestites do you know? In a small city, with ten thousand adult men in it, there are thirty-three who are in one way or another secretly dressing in some elements of feminine clothing. In a city with a million adult males there would be over three thousand such transvestites.

The fact that in the few big cities of that size the sale of transvestic literature—even at prohibitive prices—prospers would seem to support those figures. The police of such cities often have orders to look the other way when some rather ungainly suspicious woman is seen—

transvestites are rarely arrested except under circumstances arousing additional suspicion—walking the streets alone late at night (which occurs to the tv as being a safe time to make an excursion where he will not be seen or inspected under the cruel light of the sun), going into ladies' washrooms (where tvs may find themselves compelled to go in answer to nature's needs), or being involved in a traffic violation while dressed (the supposed woman has to fish a man's driving license out of the handbag—and the game is shot).

It is no crime to wear women's clothes if you are a woman. Nor are women's clothes in any way obscene, nor could they be by definition. The fact that within such clothes there may not be a woman but a man is something that cannot be easily discerned by any policeman, and it would go ill with a cop who guessed wrong while trying to enforce some local ordinance against wearing the clothes of the other sex.

The legality of transvestism is a confused matter. Basically transvestism is not an offense against anyone . . . it is a solitary activity, and on the surface merely an act of self-disguise. Behind the doors of one's home, one may dress or undress in any way one pleases. The law is concerned only with what happens in public places, the streets and public buildings. What kind of law then is the transvestite likely to run afoul of if he dares go out in public disguised as a woman?

Some cities have ordinances specifically making the wearing of the opposite sex's clothing a crime. Most cities do not, but prefer to utilize such catch-all ordinances as "disturbing the peace" or "suspicion." There are

laws in some places about appearing in disguise; such laws operate against cross-dressers.

State laws also vary. But usually the transvestite is likely to get off with a reprimand from the judge or at the worst a small fine. He hasn't done anything, and usually he hasn't disturbed anyone's peace. But the penalty of being caught is more than any judge fixes. It is often combined with public exposure in the papers and may result in loss of job, disgrace among family and friends—results which are far more out of proportion than the supposed damage done to society.

Because the transvestite knows his personal guilt in giving way to his compulsive desires he suffers quite enough normally, without having to carry the stigma of public scorn. Too often he is a responsible member of society, a family breadwinner, a father, or a good son. What he does is not of his creation—he is a product of his parents and of the society they raised—or mis-raised—him in. If one must punish the transvestite, first punish the abnormal world which created him, the world perching on the edge of atomic destruction. And if you can't remedy that world, then accept the transvestite for what he is—a man finding relief from the tensions around him. Be thankful he isn't finding his relief in mayhem, viciousness, alcohol, narcotics, and rape.

What the transvestite does is harmless. It can be condoned and it should be condoned. If wearing high heels, a slip, a bra, and a dress is damaging to the public morality, then the majority of American citizens are obscene—and they are not and such a charge is nonsense. The man who wears such clothes may be pitied, he may be

—and is usually—somewhat ridiculous. He may know he is making a fool of himself, but he hurts only himself and he harms no one else. He does it because of a compulsion put upon him without his wishing it at an age when he could not prevent it or know better. The parents of a transvestite son do not themselves know what the results of their actions will be—and their actions too are guided by the sickness of the world around them.

Someday this world may be perfect and parents will be models of intelligence and understanding and there will be riches for everyone and peace eternally and never a harsh word heard anywhere. In that day there will be no crime, no problems, and no such thing as abnormal psychology.

But until that happy day, let's at least try to have some compassion. Let only him who is without guilt cast the first stone.

Chapter Twenty

What can transvestites do about their problems? Until recently just about nothing was possible. Because their sexual affliction is a solitary one, requiring no companion, their existence has always been kept in the shadows. Psychiatrists seldom see one and, when they do, they rarely know what to do about him. Tvs themselves know almost from instinct that what the average psychiatrist will tell them will be derived from the misleading and sparse information given in the standard texts, which is that they suffer from suppressed or latent homosexuality.

There may be, there certainly are, a few who do; but they are the exceptions. Tvs know, by the time they are sixteen, that they do not fit this pat description. As a result, they become ultra-secretive, concealing their passion for cross-dressing from their families, from their friends, from the world.

Those tvs who find themselves under psychiatric observation rarely go there of their own free will. They suffer

guilt, but the last thing they want is to talk about their confusions. Caught in some misdemeanor, a tv will often be ordered by a magistrate to have psychiatric treatment. Or, on occasion when a tv has tried to explain his compulsion to his wife or to a fiancée, he has been advised to seek treatment.

They go—and find themselves for the most part wasting their time. What they really need is to find other men having their slant and talk it out with them. What transvestites have always wanted is the chance to meet and discuss their problems together. This opportunity has rarely been granted them.

The likelihood of two tvs meeting by accident—and learning of each other's most intimate secret—is remote. Men may be the best of friends, may work together, may soldier together, may live as neighbors, and never suspect that the other is doing what he is doing too behind locked doors. The boy who hangs himself does so out of agonizing loneliness, though to the public eye he may seem the most gregarious of youth.

Magazines and booklets dealing with transvestism—the only source of self-knowledge until very recently—made a practice of refusing to forward letters from one reader to another, though they were endlessly barraged with such pleas. Their publishers, not being tvs, had no real interest in "advancing a deviant contact."

It was not until the magazine I have referred to throughout this book was founded that a chance arose for tvs to meet and consult. The circulation of the magazine was and is hampered by many things—a prohibitive price for one, amateurish appearance for another, and lack of advertising and public sales except through jour-

nals and in stores of a very dubious and sleazy nature. Yet, in spite of all this, a real nucleus of men have found each other and have created a webwork which has already proved beneficial. Through correspondence, through personal contact, through an exchange of views, they have shed more light on this modern American phenomenon than has been shed in a hundred years.

In the course of these exchanges the widespread nature of transvestism in America was revealed. Most tvs who make many contacts sooner or later run into someone they knew through normal social sources. I recall offhand a comment from one friend, an architect, who never knew that a business associate of several years before shared his transvestic inclinations—until they met at someone else's secret gathering! Another case cited to me was that of two brothers in a small Southern town, neither of whom knew of the other's activities, and both trying simultaneously to make a contact. A college instructor, attending a tv gathering, met one of his students. A Naval officer, dressing on shore leave at the home of a friend, met a shipmate, also dressed, at the same friend's house. And so on, ad infinitum.

It would seem apparent that what transvestites need is some sort of national organization. But there is a great deal of difference of opinion on that question. By nature, most tvs are rather reticent, and while many may be leaders in society or business, where their dressing is concerned they'd rather not stick their necks out. There is a large body of thought that the situation as it stands is good enough—informal contacts made through others, now that the ball has started rolling. No clubs, no formal organization, just groups of friends and occasional parties

when someone feels like giving one.

Others point out that they should make it easier for their unknown brethren to come out of their closets and locked rooms. They point out that the public needs enlightenment on the subject, that science can use more data and information to everyone's benefit, that lawmakers can stand a little clarification and correction, that their fellow tvs can use some defense in a jam.

All of which would seem to make sense, except that the question then arises what kind of organization and how.

There seem to be three levels at which this can be approached: the surface level, the humanitarian level, the secret level.

On the surface, transvestism can be considered just a form of masquerade hobby. Stamp-collectors band together, amateur theatrical groups exist, dance clubs are known, then why not a guilt-free organization of "amateur female impersonators." Such would be conceivable as a national organization whose only purpose is to further the hobby of female impersonation—*as a hobby*—without any reference to the psychology behind it, or effort to dig beneath the surface of why some men find this a form of relaxation.

Strictly speaking, there are thousands of men who attend public balls in feminine guise and nobody thinks twice about it. I do not refer to drag balls, but legitimate costume parties of social clubs, fraternal orders, summer resorts, etc. For such men, dressing is "merely" a masquerade hobby, nothing more.

On that basis, a national organization could be formed to further the hobby—set up clubs for discussion, organize parties, give assistance in the masquerade technique, arrange costume-makers, and so forth. All on the up and up, no embarrassing questions asked, and good for business. Many a wig maker and private dressmaker could find such a club quite profitable. If a hobby is something one does for fun and relaxation in one's spare time, then cross-dressing is a hobby—and as widespread and popular as many.

That's the surface approach.

I heard the humanitarian approach outlined by a minister who had learned about transvestism from one of his congregation. He suggested the formation of "Transvestites Anonymous." Suggested of course by the highly successful Alcoholics Anonymous, this organization would not attempt to cure transvestism but to give it a safe outlet, to help the frustrated, to prevent suicides, and to heal marital fractures. It would operate like A.A., in that it would attempt to establish a telephone listing for Transvestites Anonymous in every major city, with a phone that can be called at certain hours. Tvs in distress can call that number, talk to someone who understands them, and get consolation and advice. If necessary it can arrange meetings to talk over their problems, remedy their misfortunes. The organization would use its funds to gain public understanding and at least some measure of tolerance. And if transvestism can be cured, TA would attempt to promote such efforts.

There is something to be said for this approach too. It could be done, and perhaps it will be attempted. That then is the humanitarian approach.

On the secret level, there is the idea of a fraternal order, open only to the initiate, with its own rules and

closed meetings. Such an organization has already been attempted, but it has not gained the support of the great majority of tvs.

The organization was founded by Virginia and is run as a one-man operation by that magazine publisher. Unlike respectable fraternal orders, its membership is known only to its owner-director, and members know each other only through that director's coded file. They have no constitution, no means of changing or establishing rules or bylaws, no means of checking on the veracity and activities of their leader. Most tvs regard it simply as a return to the locked room—and consider it as a commercial operation on Virginia's part. Unfortunately the writer of this book must also so regard it.

A genuine fraternal order could be considered, but it has yet to be organized. It seems to me that the first two types of organization are much more likely to develop into realities.

Meanwhile, transvestites are slowly but surely making themselves manifest in this country. They are a real phenomenon of our times and cannot be permanently swept under the rug. There are too many of them and the soil in which they flourish is still spreading and will continue to spread while the crisis of the twentieth century remains at a critical point.

This is a world in which men have been the dominant sex, a "man's world" in truth, and this is the way nature intended it. But somehow the rulers and thinkers and makers of this world have botched the job, have fumbled the ball of civilization, and are shaking the whole structure of human society in their frenzied efforts to re-establish a balance.

When the high-technology civilizations of West and East find themselves lopsided with the need for a fantastic arms race and hopelessly obsessed with plans for Megawar and Overkill, the dominant sex in these societies has good reason to doubt its stability and its self-confidence. When irrationality and hysteria reign in the all-male high councils of the world, men may well yearn for some area of relative calm and escape from male responsibility.

When I was going over my correspondence with Val, I saw a letter he quoted which he received in response to an article about the poetry of transvestism. The letter was from a well-known American clubwoman, poetess, and literary critic, Lilith Lorraine. Perhaps this comment from a real woman is the right note on which to end this book:

"Can there be a deep-seated lack of completion in the modern male, who has at last discovered the quality of completion in woman?

"I am frankly amazed at this whole problem and cannot quite analyze what lies back of it, except one more desperate attempt on the part of the male toward security and refuge in a woman's world. The quality which man lacks and which is destroying the male sex is sought for by one set of men working on one phase of the difference. The attainment of what woman has and man does not, but which he must have now if he is to survive, seems to be approached by the supremely sensitive man with some vestige of imagination by literally going off on a tangent of the details of dress.

"What in God's name is happening to the male sex?"

You may well ask.

A NOTE

ON THE TYPE

IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

The text of this book is set in *Caledonia*, a Linotype face, which belongs to the family of printing types called "modern face" by printers—a term used to mark the change in style of type-letters that occurred about 1800. Caledonia borders on he general design of Scotch Modern, but is more freely drawn than that letter.